

*The*  
GRIM  
13

Edited by  
FREDERICK STUART GREENE



## **THE GRIM THIRTEEN**





# THE GRIM THIRTEEN

SHORT STORIES

BY  
THIRTEEN AUTHORS OF STANDING

EDITED BY  
FREDERICK STUART GREENE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
EDWARD J. O'BRIEN  
Editor of "The Best Short Stories of 1916"



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**TO**

**BLANCHE COLTON WILLIAMS, M.A., PH.D.,**

**WHO QUAILS NOT AT THE UNHAPPY ENDING,**

**THIS COLLECTION OF STORIES**

**IS DEDICATED IN APPRECIATION OF THE FINE WORK**

**SHE IS DOING AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

**AND HUNTER COLLEGE FOR THE**

**AMERICAN SHORT STORY.**



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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HERE were six of us gathered around the fire that evening, and we were talking about short stories as they are published in American magazines. Three of us wrote short stories ourselves, and the most absorbing interest of two others was the critical study of the American short story. The sixth member of our circle was in a class apart. He sometimes published the short stories we had written and criticised.

As we chatted away more or less idly, we reformed most of the magazines of our acquaintance, and dismissed more than one momentous question of national policy with a phrase. Suddenly one of us who writes stories himself put the question half seriously: "If Poe were living to-day, would the American magazines publish his stories?" We wondered, a bit lazily perhaps. It was the general opinion that they would not. And then, as we began to speculate, the subject took on a certain human interest, and we were roused to question among ourselves as to what the reasons could be for this undeniable fact.

Some of us thought that it was due to altered critical standards. Others ascribed it to the influ-

ence of O. Henry. But after some discussion, it seemed clear to us all that there was a taboo against grim or gruesome stories in editorial circles, and that American editors believed the public demanded the happy ending.

We began to call a roll of American story-tellers, and as name after name was mentioned, the question arose in our minds as to whether or not every story-teller might not have one story in his private drawer which no magazine would agree to publish because of its gruesome character. The conviction grew among us that a grim story, no matter whether it was a literary masterpiece or not, was hoodooed.

And then the inspiration came. Why not try to find thirteen hoodooed masterpieces by thirteen unlucky masters, and throw them upon the mercies of the public for a vote? No sooner suggested than done. Story-tellers, critics, and publisher for once were agreed. If there were thirteen unlucky stories in America good enough to print in a book, we would find them and publish them with our appeal for judgment.

So here they are. It is too soon to value them except by relative standards, but I must confess that many of them seem to have an assured quality that belongs to literature. For several years it has been my province to read critically the great mass of short stories published in America, with a view to gathering the best of them into more permanent form than a magazine can offer. I have found many stories of

conspicuous excellence in these years, but taking into consideration the average quality of these thirteen grim stories, I am impressed more than ever with the fact that many of the best stories written in England and the United States to-day find it impossible to achieve publication in American magazines.

In the selection of these thirteen stories, the first condition which each story had to meet was that of repeated rejection by American magazines. The thirteen stories which you are about to read have been tabooed by American editors, because they believe that you do not like realism, or unhappy romance.

The great literary periods have been characteristically tolerant in the free imaginative play permitted to writers by the general public. Wherever you find a period in which literary achievement has been compelled by general opinion to follow prescribed paths, you find an unimaginative formalism and an arid technical excellence. On the other hand, wherever you find a generation, eager and curious in its study of human nature, tolerant toward innovation and open-minded with regard to the literary production of its writers, you find also an alert criticism of life and a richly human art flourishing and spreading widely into other countries.

Now the characteristic contribution of America to literature is the short story. We are specially responsive to the art of the short story writer, even when we are least critical of his achievement. During

the generation which is just coming to a close, the public for short stories has grown so rapidly that it is now practically coextensive with the population of the country. Never before in history have the commercial rewards been greater, and never, alas, before have these rewards had so decisive an influence in dictating the matter and manner of the American short story.

Under these circumstances, it behooves every American writer to search deeply in his heart for the assurance that his creative work is the sincere and uninfluenced expression of what he most desires to say. It is specially necessary that he should not permit himself to compromise his standards by yielding to the pressure of high commercial rewards, when these rewards imply a moulding influence upon his literary work.

This book seeks to remove, or at least to define clearly, one taboo. It proves that thirteen writers have found that some of their finest imaginative work could not achieve magazine publication without sensible modification. I think that these stories one and all prove that much fine and sincere work is lost every year to America by reason of these restrictions.

For example, "The Abigail Sheriff Memorial," by Vincent O'Sullivan, is as fine a story as that author has given us in any of his volumes. Mr. O'Sullivan is regarded in Europe as one of the five recent American writers of fiction whose work measures up to European standards of novel-writing. Yet his mas-

terly psychological acumen, because it lacks sentimental flabbiness, debars him from American magazines. Such a story as this challenges the intellect, and intellectual pleasure is not the chief end sought in the American short story of the present day.

Some years ago, Miss Alice Brown published a story called "The Master." It dealt with the personality of a great American writer, who had given up the social pleasures of a city to retire to a remote island and give the world the imaginative fruit of his social observation. Many other writers were gathered at dinner and spoke of him, and editors who were there confessed that they could not often afford to print his stories because of their subtle craftsmanship, but when the old man came into their midst and sat among them, suddenly they all knew that he was their master, to whom they owed the allegiance of a previously unconscious discipleship.

When I read Mr. O'Sullivan's story, I thought of this, and I wondered how many hidden masters America might have, if we were only more hospitable to their sincerity. I do not know whether "The Master" whom Miss Brown had in mind was Henry James, but it seems to me that this repatriated American, whom America refuses to appreciate, is likely to become his most logical successor.

Hardly second to it in fine human quality is "Old Fags," by Stacy Aumonier. The managing editor of one of the oldest and most conservative of America's literary periodicals confessed to me that this was the

finest story, in his opinion, that his magazine had received during 1916, yet he did not publish it. Two other editors of magazines with national reputations justly earned, also told me that they regarded it as impossible to publish, because of the offence it would give their readers. I state these facts frankly in order that the public may judge for itself how far these editors have mirrored its desires.

When "The Black Pool," by Frederick Stuart Greene, was first called to my attention, I was amazed to find that a story whose plot was so original and whose inevitable unfolding was depicted with such power should have been consistently rejected by magazine editors because of its unhappy ending.

Now I do not claim that all of these thirteen stories are permanent additions to American literature. I am sure that five or six of them rank with the best that our writers have yet produced, but whether or not the others will be remembered twenty years from now, one thing is certain, and that is that there is no story in this volume which does not merit serious critical attention and challenging interest from the general reading public.

I regard this book therefore as the most valuable proof that can be afforded of the fact that American literature demands tolerant fostering. It would be a serious and perhaps a fatal thing if such talents as these were denied expression because our mood was lazy and our hearts sentimental. Besides, to any reader whose mind is not sunk too far in the drowsy,



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listlessness of narcotic fiction, these stories are a bracing imaginative summons. They give life new values, and transmute old values into a new currency of our own realm.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.



# THE DAY OF DAHEIMUS

BY

VANCE THOMPSON

AUTHOR OF

THE GREATER SINNER—*Cosmopolitan Magazine*

THE ETERNAL LOVER—*Cosmopolitan Magazine*

IT—*Cosmopolitan Magazine*

LIEUTENANT LESTRELIN, COWARD—*Saturday  
Evening Post*

This collection of stories is started with Mr. Thompson's " Day of Daheimus " because, to our mind, it sounds the pitch for the volume. We believe the vivid characterisation and the craftsmanship shown in handling the theme will give pleasure to all who appreciate tales written because the author felt an urge to write them and not because he strove only to turn out something that would surely sell. Like all the stories here set down, it has been rejected with praise by many magazines.

F. S. G.

## I

### THE DAY OF DAHEIMUS

**I**T is not strange these things happened—everything happens; what is strange is that they were not hid. They were done in open day, and even now the trail of them lies plain and discernible over the streets and avenues of the city. Murders have been done in ways so dark there was no uncovering them. Mole-murders; they crept so quietly underground there was neither heave nor ripple of the turf to mark their way. These crimes were successful because they were done in the dark. The bullet flew with none to note its flight. The poison struck, and none knew whence it came. The murderer got his vengeance, and found his safety, because he worked alone and in secret, with no witness and no accomplice. In just such a way, for instance, Père Vanille was killed in that obscure room in the Boulevard Voltaire; pulled down by a vengeance that had hunted him from Tahiti and the Southern seas; it was a crime of mystery; there was nothing but darkness and through it a flash of murder.

Now, the murder of Daheimus was mysterious because it was openly done—with public discussion and doctors and lawyer at the bedside. It was mysterious,

I repeat, because it was done in a blaze of light. It was as though the murderer had hid himself in light so dazzling he could not be seen; as though his crime were based on the crowd of witnesses he drew about him.

He could not have gone more frankly about his business of revenge and murder, if he had brought Daheimus down Broadway in a gilt wagon drawn by six piebald horses, with outriders and a brass band leading the way; and a police parade following. And just because it was so public, it was mysterious as the arrow that flies by night.

Which is a strange thing.

In this account of the death of Daheimus, I shall not begin with the murder and travel back to the initial cause thereof; it is better to make a beginning the day David Rennich was carried out of the Daheimus brewery, his little leg pulped and broken. David was six years old, possibly seven. Pride was on him that day. For the first time, and also for the last, he carried a tin pail, containing his father's dinner, down to the engine room in the brewery. Being a small, alert boy, his black eyes quick with curiosity; he prowled into a danger zone, was caught in what interlocking play of steel I know not; and was rescued with a right leg hideously smashed.

Now of this small and broken David, it is probable Daheimus never heard. Fat, and blond, and huge, and happy, the Daheimus rolled through the kind of society such a man can find, seeking food and drink and

laughter; and the brewery was merely the hereditary source of the money he wallowed in. Not to him would come word, or wail, of the young David, carted away to the hospital. Had he heard of it, he would have been moved to tears and violent outbursts of generosity; but of that trivial accident he never heard. And of course he was in no way responsible for it, no more than the wind that blew a colour into his fat and smiling face, as he waddled that midday to his club. Had Daheimus been a farseeing man . . .

Do you remember Holbein's Dance of Death at Basle? Cardinals and princes, merchants and beggars, women, children—and, as they dance, each is seized upon by his own Death, which is a grim and capering skeleton.

Had Daheimus been a farseeing man the day little David was caught in the interlocking play of steel in the brewery, he would have discerned a capering figure, still a long way off, that started up and moved toward him—a lean piper blowing a tibia—his own Death; but Daheimus, as he waddled clubward, was thinking of other things.

Three months later David was taken back to his home with a shortened right leg that could not be made straight and which bent out at the knee, sideways, and was twisted in at the ankle. He was carried up four pair of stairs, for his home was in a tenement, built of shrewishly clean bricks and steel, that fronted the East River and had a view of Blackwell's Island—for modernised poverty has pre-empted one of the fairest



sites in New York City. David was put in a chair, with another chair as a rest for his stiff and crooked leg; and his mother crooned over him. She was a little dark-visaged woman, who wore a wig made of brown flax, a dreadful, flagrant thing, such as the women of the Polish and Galician Jews of those parts put on with marriage. But Mrs. Rennich was not a Hebrew woman. She belonged to an obscurer and more tragic race. So far as she knew she was a gipsy. Somewhere, kindly Jews had found her—a waif-child in the streets—and given her food, home, nurture, religion; in due season they had married her to old Rennich. After ten years of married life there was no beauty in her, for she was wrinkled like an old woman and her teeth were broken and black; but there was something better than beauty in her as she crooned over her little son—she was radiant with mother love. It was only for this whelp of her tiger-breed she softened. And the whelp, stretched on the blanketed chairs, looked up at her with terror—and adoration. It was the look you • have seen in the eyes of a dog, when it seeks godhead in a human face. It was evident that both his fear and his love pleased the woman. She stroked his head and kissed him and smiled. Then she went to the table and poured him out a cup of coffee. (The child had been weaned on coffee.) It was cold, for it had stood a long time; it was dark and full of dregs. She fixed her black eyes on him as he took the cup.

“Is it good?” she asked, “is it warm? Is it sweet for my little son?”

"It's cold and bitter," said the child timidly.

She blew her breath on the coffee and little David, staring, saw it bubble and fume with heat; it whitened, under her breath, as though with milk; and when he tasted the hot liquid it was honey-sweet.

"Now it is sweet and hot," he said; and drank it slowly.

His mother laughed and sat with her arm round him, crooning; so old Rennich found them when he came in.

All had not gone well with old Rennich since the accident. With East Side promptitude he had demanded compensation for David's injury. With unanswerable logic, the brewery-folk replied that David had no business in the engine-room, no justifiable interest in the interlocking play of steel; and that not a penny of compensation would be paid. Old Rennich might have been content, but the mother was of harder metal. Many and curious were the curses she laid upon Daheimus—rolling harmlessly in his social world of beer—curses multiple, awful, unprintable. She questioned the Gods of Things that Are to Come to Pass, blowing feathers and reading the scroll of the coffee-grounds; and always she found a fortune of money. At last she made the Test that Does Not Fail. She broke an egg into a plate and dashed boiling water on it and, lo! in lines and curves the yolk and albumen streamed toward her left hand—not her right—promising white silver and yellow gold. Thereupon old Rennich (having thriftily eaten the prophetic egg) went

out and hired a lawyer. It was sending good money after a bad leg. The case was hopelessly lost. Thereupon the brewery, the principle of the thing being safe, made the Rennichs a present of two hundred dollars. It was not enough or it was too much; it took old Rennich on a wandering career of drink from which it was not in his destiny to return.

By this time (a year was gone by) little David was able to get about freely with that strange gait, half crawl and half hop, which was to be his way of going through life. The home was still in the high tenement overlooking the river. The mother saw to it they had fire and fuel. There was no lack of money, for now she told the weird fortunes that are in the coffee-grounds and the feathers and the egg on the plate, for those who could pay for knowledge of the Things that Are to Come to Pass. There were many of these folk. And the name of the old woman, for she looked old, was famous as far as Third Avenue. She called herself Zaquah. Moreover she promised to "heal" mysteriously the diseases of that wretched world that lay about her. She used a few drugs and herbs; but in the main she depended upon dark and uncouth mummeries that were far more effective. Often she laughed in derision as her dupes went away happy; then suddenly she would start and tremble lest she had offended the Powers; the dupester was also her own dupe. David, silent in the corner, saw and heard many strange things.

You can see him sitting there, if you will, a dimin-

tive lad of nine, or ten, or eleven, for the years made little change. He was beautiful in an uncanny way, like some dark and deformed flower. His face was narrow and pale and almost perfect in contour; and the black eyes that looked out of it were bright with intelligence; they gleamed with it. His long, white hands were fashioned to wear rings and hold a sceptre. He should have been a king's son on some perfumed edge of the Orient. And he crouched there in a tenement, while his old mother, withering more and more into a hag, whispered and cursed.

The curses were for Daheimus, but it was into the heart of her little son she poured them, that they might bear fruit.

Almost always David was silent. To his mother he gave only the answers she wished to hear. He would sit for hours, his dark eyes fixed on her, watching every movement of her hands, every grimace of her face, as she played her cheating games of sorcery and "healing"—herself, at last, her greatest dupe. She healed and wondered at her healing; she feared her own witchcraft, though she knew her own cunning had made it. And David sat there, his delicate hands folded, his pallid, pure face bent forward, like some unhappy little prince who had been caught by a hag and carried away to her garret. When the "clients" were gone, she held him to her poor old breasts, stroking his head and "laying love" on him. It was at such times she crooned murder into his ear. The name of Daheimus worked in him like a spell. At night, when she put him

in bed, she kissed his warped and twisted leg and whispered that name; with it she woke him in the morning. Had not all her ills, the crooked leg of her son and the drink-harried death of her husband and her dangerous trade, with its fears and penalties, come from Daheimus?

And that foolish, harmless man?

Three or four times a year Daheimus rolled up to his brewery in a purple motor car, a fresh-coloured, smiling, huge man, overfed and underhealthed. He had no regular time for coming. He came upon impulse, when the fancy touched him. But in some unclean way, warned by the feathers or the clotted egg, old Zaquah knew when he would come. Always she was in the street to see him pass. Always, at her side, stood little David, white and silent, his great eyes blazing blackly at the man who was (even then) his victim. Then home again to the tenement, and the coffee that bubbled, and the "clients" bargaining for hope or health; and the litany of curses for Daheimus.

David had no companions; he could neither run nor play. In time (later than other boys) he was unearthed by an inspector and taken to school. He found a delight in his studies. The man's brain in his little body hungered for the food of thought. One of his teachers called him a prodigy. It was as though he were not learning and acquiring things; it was as though he were remembering, with amazing rapidity, an old familiar store of knowledge. There was no

effort; he did not study; he steadied himself and remembered, so this teacher said.

"He shall be a great man," she predicted; she patted his curls, for she loved the sad and gentle lad.

He became a great man, but not in the way she thought.

Zaquah's room was filled daily with disease-riddled folk. Perhaps this was the reason David became a target for disease. When fever-stricken patients came to her, he, too, burned with fever, until she conjured it away. He had many illnesses; possibly they were not real, mere phantom illnesses that played with the sensitive child. They may have been old Zaquah's experiments. But one of them cannot be explained that way. It was a disease that fastened a fungus growth in his throat one night. That day they had seen (as often before) Daheimus roll by in the big motor car; but he was a shrunken Daheimus, with a new look of cowardice in his kindly face. Old Zaquah had stared at him with set, clairvoyant eyes, for the few minutes his car had been halted at the street-crossing. When he was borne out of sight, she caught her son's arm and laughed. And that night the foul thing blossomed poisonously in David's throat.

This disease was real enough; it nearly put an end to the lad's life, and her vengeance. (For a moment, too, the lean Death, capering toward the unconscious Daheimus, checked and paused irresolute.) Old Zaquah battled for days and nights, now brewing herbs, now invoking the Powers. Once, the room half-dark

with wintry day, David seemed to be dying on the bed, a little tortured, twisted figure, with gaping throat. For a long while his mother stood over him, motionless. Then without haste, calmly, she went to her incantations. She lighted some inflammable liquid, perhaps alcohol, in a tin plate on the table. She fanned the flames with her hands and with her breath, whispering hoarsely, in words older than the Sphinx, the spells of her race. Hour after hour she called upon the Gods of the Things that Must Not Be. Her voice sank to a monotone; the passion went out of it; she became steady, serene, compelling—a dark hag commanding the flames. Suddenly she laughed aloud and went over and opened the door.

A young woman in a raincoat wet with melting snow came in diffidently.

“Does little David Rennich live here?” she asked.

“He is living here,” said Zaquah, and she pointed to the dying lad in the bed.

“Oh, poor David!” the young woman cried and went quickly to the bed and knelt. She was the school-teacher who predicted David would be a great man, perhaps because she loved him. A woman sweet without witchcraft; swiftly competent as women are in the face of death; within an hour she had him taken to a great hospital. Zaquah neither hindered nor thanked her. It was Doctor Gage himself, the great throat specialist, who operated on the boy.

“He will do well enough for a while,” Doctor Gage told the school-teacher, who had come, after her work,



for word with him, "but there is nothing can stop it—nothing we know. Another operation and another and then death will come, but not as soon as he wishes! How old is he? It's very sad."

Still, for the time being, David was saved from the fell disease. He came out of the hospital taller, but still very small for his years. What was strangest was that his voice had wholly changed. It had been a soft and veiled voice; now it was hard, a voice of metal, dominant and clear.

He left the hospital hobbling at the side of the young school-teacher and talking to her in that new strange voice. He was full of gratitude and spoke to her without shyness, like a man. She smiled a little sadly, for the child she had loved was gone. Then school again.

And now came the day which picked up the threads of his life and knitted them to the thing he was to do in this world.

What Doctor Gage had said came true. Home-coming one day David pushed his mother away when she would have kissed him and pointed to his throat. The foul thing had come back, savager and more vicious than before. David threw himself down on the bed and lay there, silent, his hands clenched over his head. It may be that in those school-days other ambitions than that of murder had come to him, dreams of the fair things of youth, and now he realised that death was on them and on him; so he lay there, this

little prince who had been stolen away from his destiny and tempered and edged for murder.

Old Zaquah bent over him and whispered: "You will sleep, my son."

"I cannot sleep," he whispered.

She laid her hands on his temples; and he slept.

In an hour she woke him.

"Now we shall go to the hospital," she said and got him his hat. The great hospital that dominates that part of the East Side was not far and they went afoot. No one stopped them at the door. No one questioned them as they went up in the hospital lift. They went straight and unhindered to the room where Doctor Gage stood washing his hands after his day's work, his white blouse cast aside. The great man recognised David at once and pain came into his look.

"So soon!" he exclaimed, "what do you expect me to do now? You must make an appointment. This is not right."

David's tragic eyes hurt him; he hid his sympathy in brusque impatience.

"Just look at his throat, Doctor," the mother begged, "just to see if it is bad—a minute, a little minute, Doctor!"

David did not speak.

"Well, come here!"

Doctor Gage turned on a reflecting light and made a swift examination.

"You must make an appointment as soon as you can. I will speak about it myself. It is very irregular

your coming here like this. There—I'll do what I can."

Doctor Gage was a tender-hearted man, and in addition David had impressed him in a singular way. The black, hopeless eyes seemed to hold him.

"Is it very bad?" the old woman asked, "is it as bad as it can be? Is it so bad it cannot be cured?"

"I will do what I can," he said.

The eagerness did not die out of Zaquah's face as she led her son homeward, through the noisy avenue; it was there when they reached their room on the fourth floor of the tenement and it remained while she helped him into his bed. David saw it and fear struck at his heart, but he dared not speak.

"Lie still," his mother said, "but do not sleep."

He watched her through half-closed eyes. He heard her call upon her gods, with all the mummary she did not believe in, but feared. And then she wakened the flames in the tin plate on the table and blackened them with incense. Soon the room was thick with fumes; and in the fumes David gasped and sickened. The old woman went to and fro, busily, always chirping and whispering to her gods. Slowly the incense clouds faded; and she fed the flames on the plate with fiery spirits and they leaped up again. David saw that she was holding in the flames a little copper pot with a handle, a sort of ladle, half filled with some reddish fluid that seethed and stank. She held it there a long time, her hand wrapped in her upgathered skirt, as a shield against the heat. Seen in that dancing light she

was gruesome and unreal. The flax wig was askew, disclosing wisps of grey hair; her eyes were rimmed with red and water dripped from them; her half-opened mouth showed the broken and discoloured teeth. At last she poured the awful decoction into a cup and carried it to the bedside. David had not moved. She crouched down by the bed and drew him to her, turning his head over on her knee and opening his mouth with her fingers, as though it were a baby's mouth; then, slowly, she let the reddish fluid drip into his throat. After a few drops had entered his throat he gasped and choked, but she held his mouth shut. Again she let the fluid drip into his mouth; and again. Only when the ladle was empty did she place his head back on the pillow. Then she went to the table and kneeled there, whispering to the dying flames; for hours she did not move.

Now the thing is absurd and impossible; but it is an exact fact that when David stood up, just as day broke, his throat was clear. It was cleaner than it had been after the surgeon's knife delved in it. There was neither rawness in it nor pain. It was the throat of a hale man who had never known blight nor disease. And the voice had come back with a new and harder ring of metal in it.

These are facts; they are set down here without emphasis or exaggeration; you may attribute that cure (which Doctor Gage himself could not make) to the old woman's wizardry or to what chance you please; the compelling fact is that David was "healed."

There are, as you have seen, three important people in this story: Daheimus, who floated like a porpoise in a certain kind of society; the old woman who laid her curse on him; and David. But there are other people, tools of destiny, who come and go in the story. Of these, witnesses of the murder or accomplices, the chief is Doctor Gage, who had been brought into it by the selfless charity of a little school-teacher in a dragged raincoat. And the story has reached Doctor Gage's house. It is a wide, tall house of brownstone in lower Fifth Avenue. What had once been a spacious *salon* was now his reception room. Behind it were his offices and a private operating-room. Doctor Gage was a youngish man of fifty, loose-jointed, rather soft, with too much fat, but quick and energetic, a nervous, talkative man, full of gestures. World-famous; he was one of the great surgeons of the day; a man of science with a dangerous, eccentric touch of genius in him; this was and is Doctor Robert Eskelin Gage. For many weeks past one of his patients had been Daheimus. A changed Daheimus; he was older, thinner, and the redness had gone out of his cheeks; in his blue, bulbous eyes was a look of pain and fear. That huge throat down which he had fed such royal food, down which he had poured a flood-tide of burning drink, had rebelled. He rooted no more in the trough of life. All that lay in a dubious past. He was fighting for mere existence. Gladly he had given the brewery as a fee, had there been one to save him. He was Daheimus—the man with a cancer in his throat. His terrors and

hopes had driven him to Europe, where the experts had delved and sliced in his throat; and he had come back to Doctor Gage, whom first he had asked to save him. A terrified, flabby man, he crouched in a big chair in the doctor's private office, waiting. And though he knew it not the thing he was waiting for was coming toward him—a skeleton, piping a tibia—swiftly on dancing feet.

It was three o'clock and David was making ready to leave his dingy home that faced Blackwell's Island and the river. Note, too, that exactly eleven years had passed since he had been carried out of the Daheimus brewery, with a pulped and broken leg, exactly eleven years since his mother's gods had begun to dream fitfully of murder. And it was exactly twenty-four hours since he had stood in front of Doctor Gage in his room in the hospital, and shown to him a throat death-poisoned with cancer. Now he stood looking at his mother. The youth had gone out of his face. It was a man's face, set and steady as a mask. Old Zaquah stared into his eyes.

"David, son of my man," she said, "after all the years today is the day."

And she talked to him of the old vengeance on Daheimus, and of her will, and his will, and the will of her gods; in just such a way she was wont to talk when a new client came to question the Gods of the Things that Are to Come to Pass. She chattered and chirped instructions to him with queer excitement. One had said the very springs of life within her were danc-

ing and bubbling. A kind of youthfulness, gay and malevolent, looked out of her eyes. Her gods had not failed her. They had ripened her vengeance. They had fastened her curse on the throat of her enemy; there it festered and flowered. Surely the eternal *Dévas* of the East had not failed her. And now, for David could not fail her, her vengeance was secure. So she kissed him and sent him on his way, watching him, as he limped down the iron stairs of the tenement.

It was a strange, white-faced little figure in his new suit of black clothes, such as are sold in his highway for a few dollars; too large a hat fell over his brows, and shaded the thin face and the wonderful eyes. Now shuffling along the sidewalk with his queer staccato gait, now carried in a street car, he made his way to Fifth Avenue and the house of Doctor Gage. (A purple motor car halted at the kerb.)

David did not enter the waiting-room. He went down the hall and opened the door of the private office. Doctor Gage looked up at him impatiently.

"What the deuce do you mean by coming in here?" he asked.

"Listen to what I have to say," David said quickly, in that new, vibrant and compelling voice of his.

"Oh, it's you," Doctor Gage said, recognising the patient who had come to him the day before, "you know, my poor boy, I can do little for you."

"No, you can do little for any one, but what I can do, you do not know. I have come here to tell you."

All this David repeated in a pompous way that might have been ridiculous had it not been for the strength behind the words. The answer the doctor found was rather curious: "You speak as one having authority," he said; but a moment later he laughed at himself.

"You're a strange young man," he added, "but I am a strange old man—so I'll hear what you have to say, if you can say it in two minutes. You will pardon me, Mr. Daheimus?"

His apology was to the flabby figure in the arm-chair.

"You looked at my throat yesterday," said David, "look at it now, and then I will speak."

Doctor Gage smiled at the air of authority, but for some reason he consented to make the inspection. A moment later he started back and cried, "My God! man," for the throat he had looked into was that of a hale and healed man.

"What is it?" Daheimus whispered angrily, but Doctor Gage did not even glance at him. He was staring at David Rennich, as a bystander may have stared at Lazarus. David sat on the edge of the lacquer chair; he crooked his twisted leg under it, and laid his grotesque hat carefully on the floor.

"What you could not cure in my throat another has cured," he said in his stilted way, "and I do not ask you to believe me or to believe your own eyes. My purpose is to convince you. You have men, rich men," David went on, but he did not glance at the



crouching bulk of a man in the armchair, "who would give a fortune to be healed as I have been healed. Therefore I must convince you."

Daheimus was whispering anxiously: "His throat? What was the matter with his throat?" but they paid no heed to him.

"Convince me?" Doctor Gage repeated, "convince me?"

"I will give you the medicine that cured me. And when you have tested it and tried it—please do not interrupt me, let me say what I have to say—for I expect you to make every test you please, in your laboratory or in the hospital. Yes, certainly in the hospital. There are many poor men, as well as rich men, dying of that disease. Take one of those poor men, a man doomed to death, a man for whom all your science can do nothing, a man who must die. He will consent to the trial, and when he is cured——"

"What's the game?" Daheimus put in querulously.

"A game of life and death; I offer life," David said, still looking at the doctor, "and you want to know what I will charge? To heal the poor man of cancer, nothing; to heal the rich man ten thousand dollars. Since that man has spoken, I tell you my price. I will give you, for nothing, sufficient medicine to cure one poor man, one hopeless case, in your hospital, or where you please. I will give you enough to cure two such men, if you will, or three. Then the experiments must cease and payment must begin"—and in those last three words, as David spoke them, was the ring of

metal and menace; he ended by saying: "I have said what I came to say. Now it is for you to speak."

And so the story draws close to the edge of murder.

There is no need of pausing here over the discussion that fell between Doctor Gage and Daheimus, or over the long examination, whereby Doctor Gage convinced himself of the certain fact that David, his cancerous patient, was wholly healed. Once he was convinced of the reality of the cure, the man of genius that was in the great scientist flashed into enthusiasm. There had still to appear in the transaction Dufayel, the lawyer. His business was to safeguard the man of money, and cancer, lest ten thousand dollars be taken from him. The advice of this shrewd and cynical man of law was this: "You risk nothing. Try this so-called cure on some poor devil, already condemned to death. If it saves him try another. Make sure. I understand your man is willing to supply the medicine for three experiments. When you come to try it on Daheimus I will hold the money. If the young man earns it, I will pay it over; if not, there is no one the poorer; but I hope to heaven I'll have to pay it."

"Write me out a paper that the rich man will pay the price when he is healed," David had said, "and I am content."

In this way it was settled; such a contract was signed and given to him.

Now after all this talk of poor men, it was upon a poor woman, dying horribly, the first experiment was made. What happened is a matter of public record.

David brought the little phial, filled with reddish liquid, to the hospital and gave it to Doctor Gage. The only excuse Doctor Gage has given for the grim fact that the medicine was not analysed is that David Rennich would not permit it. The poor woman, who had been told of the experiment, drank it greedily, for she was drinking of her last hope, greedily as though it had been the wine of life. And it was the elixir of life. At dawn she stood erect, and her throat was clean as the mouth of a bride. For Doctor Gage it was as though the floor of the hospital rocked with miracle, for him and Dufayel, and the little cohort of medical men and surgeons. There is a full and public record of the second experiment, when a speechless, cancered man was dragged up out of the jaws of death. As before, David brought the medicine old Zaquah had brewed in the ladle, to the hospital in a corked phial; as before he had stood by and seen it administered. A third test was made. As the others succeeded, it succeeded.

And the day of Daheimus came.

That tortured man was mad with impatience; hope thrilled and chanted in him; he would have given not ten thousand but a hundred thousand, a half-million, what had he not given? Dufayel, his lawyer, had saner views of the real value of his life. Ten thousand dollars was the sum set down in the contract; and that sum was to be paid to David, when Daheimus was pronounced, by a trinity of experts, to be healed. David had carried this paper home and old Zaquah had hid-

den it in her breast. How she had chirped and crooned that day! She made the draught for Daheimus, chirping and crooning over a nest of flames in the tin plate on the table! How she fed the flames with fiery fuel and brewed again the reddish liquid that had given life to a youth, to a woman, to two men, who lay in the door of death! Always she called to her gods, who were the *Dévas* of the East. David had not heeded much, until of a sudden she gave a cry of triumph, malignant and shrill; and looking quickly up he saw she was holding a paper in the fire under the ladle. The paper blackened, blazed up, and was consumed. Then David covered his face with his long, pale hands and was silent. He knew what paper it was she had burned; and if she had destroyed that promise of ten thousand dollars, then what price was Daheimus to pay? And suddenly he saw her vengeance as something formless and black, a cloud filled with venom; and he knew the murder of which she had whispered for so many years was ready to strike. How had he dreamed, or dared to dream, that he was to carry life to Daheimus as to the other three? He was death's errand-boy. The reddish brew in the phial was old Zaquah's vengeance, perfected in the years. Who drank it drank death.

Yet when she gave it into his hands, he took it quietly, and made ready to do his errand. She held him for a moment.

"David, son of my man," she cried, and threw herself down and kissed and stroked his twisted leg and

chirped and chuckled to herself, or to her gods, in spasms of frightful merriment; an old hag drunk with the drink of vengeance, and his mother. He looked back at her as he went out, and there was a strange smile on his white face. She should have what she had sought so long; her will and the will of her gods should be done.

It was the day of Daheimus; and David went limping swiftly through the streets, to the house in Fifth Avenue, where the hope-shaken man crouched in the great armchair. By the chair Doctor Gage stood. There were three other surgeons in the room, a doctor of medicine and a white-garbed woman, a nurse. By the window Dufayel, the lawyer, lounged in a lazy attitude, but his eyes were cynical and alert.

"Quite ready," Doctor Gage said softly; he took the bottle and held it between his eyes and the light. Indeed every eye was on that red-tinted phial, even the blue, protuberant eyes of Daheimus, as the great surgeon held it up to the light; every eye save those of Dufayel, the man of law. He was scrutinising David's pale, mask-like face. What he saw there he could never explain, not even to himself. It may be he saw nothing; and it may be he caught a fugitive glimpse of a young soul, staring into the blackness of death. For David at that moment stood face to face with his tragedy. His thought was with his old mother; he could see her twisting in frightful merriment, as she dreamed of her vengeance on Daheimus,

the fruit of so many years. Even so, she should have her vengeance. That was her due. He would not thrust himself between her and her reward. What she had sown she should reap. And what was he but the sickle in her hand? What must be, must be. Only there was one thing David knew: when vengeance is taken, some one must pay. If old Zaquah won she must lose; for that is the Law of Things. She must pay for what she wanted most with what she held dearest. And thinking thus, David lifted his head, and there was a smile on his white face.

Doctor Gage was speaking to him.

"It is a larger bottle, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes, there's more than is needed," David answered slowly, "for him."

Doctor Gage poured the reddish liquid into a measuring-glass, filling it to the exact line that marked the proper dose. A little more than a third of the drug was left in the phial. Still smiling in his strange way David picked up the little bottle and held it to the light.

"A wonderful medicine, Doctor Gage," he said, "a very wonderful medicine! It has a harsh and evil taste, but you can drink it like milk. It heals and it cannot harm. Like milk," he repeated, and set the phial to his lips; and drank. Then he straightened up, as best he could, on his crippled leg and folded his thin arms across his heart. And always he smiled, like a brave man among enemies.

Daheimus broke the silence.

"You all keep me waiting," he croaked angrily, "for weeks and weeks——"

Doctor Gage administered the medicine.

Five minutes. Ten minutes, and the Daheimus heaved himself out of the chair and stood, gasping, but radiant, as though he had indeed quaffed a cup of life. They laid him on the chair again, the doctors in a cluster round him.

David spoke in his hard, metallic voice, again as one having authority:

"Let the experts decide. When the three experts have decided I shall come for the price. And now I shall go."

No one answered him. The doctors were listening to Daheimus, who was clamoring that he was healed, and would not be still. Even Dufayel was leaning over the nurse's shoulder, staring at the rich man who had been called back to life and abundant health.

David hobbled out. Once in the avenue, he hurried on at a great pace, and turned into a side street. There he went more slowly, for his crooked leg kept crumpling up under him. At last he fell and rolled over on his side; his head jerked horribly; then his mouth twisted open and, little by little, a glaze crept over his eyes; and David Rennich was dead. Almost at the same time the poor, frightened soul of the Daheimus was wrenched out of his body, in the presence of four great surgeons, a qualified medical man, a trained nurse and a leading lawyer of the New

York bar. No mole-murder; Daheimus was done to death in a blaze of light.

What was it the little school-teacher said of the gentle lad she loved?

“David will be a great man some day,” she said.

He was a great man, but not in the way she thought.



# RAIN .

BY

DANA BURNET

AUTHOR OF

“X”—*Harper's Magazine*

AN EXPERIMENT IN GENTILITY—*Saturday  
Evening Post*

A DUMB-WAITER DESTINY—*Harper's Magazine*  
SOBS—*Every Week*



## II

### RAIN

**T**HE rain had fallen for a week; steadily, monotonously, relentlessly. There had been no storm; no bluster of wind.

The sky was a grey mask covering the face of God. In all the world there was no sound but the drip, drip, drip of rain.

Allie Baird stood at her bedroom window, clad in nightdress and faded calico wrapper, her long yellow hair falling over her shoulders. In the distance lay the little Maine fishing village, huddled against the sky, and beyond it the drab reach of the sea. Out of the cluster of wet roofs a lone steeple stood grimly aloft, like a tombstone dominating a graveyard. Allie regarded that steeple with an especial hatred. It belonged to the church she had been married in. . . .

As she stood there shivering with the cold, a desolate picture composed itself in her mind. She saw again the naked wooden altar; heard once more the voice of the lugubrious minister pronouncing sentence upon her soul; felt the cold hand of Jim Baird fumbling for her hand, and the colder embrace of the ring upon her finger. It had rained that day, as it was raining now. Eighteen years! And in all that time only three

things of importance had happened to her; first, the birth of her child; second, the death of her child; and third, a trip to Portland for a minor operation. Except for these events, her life had been a barren desert of days.

In the bed behind her a man stirred, and grunted. She turned quickly, gazing down at her husband with a new and critical interest. His huge body bulked large beneath the tumbled coverings; his florid face, with its inevitable stubble of beard, seemed unusually hideous against the untidy pillow. His small eyes leered up at her with that maddening lifelessness, that phlegmatic stare which had begun to sicken her.

"Still raining, Allie?"

"Still raining."

He had asked that question every morning for a week, and she had answered it in the same way; but this morning her voice trembled. He heard, and scolded her peevishly for her incaution of dress.

"You'll catch your death, goin' about in that wrapper. Why don't you get your clothes on like a sensible woman?"

She did not reply, and he settled into his wallow, with a ponderous groan.

"Ain't no use my gettin' up awhile. This rain's a fust-rate jailer. Call me when breakfast's ready."

"I'll call you, Jim."

She dressed listlessly, and in silence. The man in the bed began to snore; she went swiftly out of the

room, with a little indrawn breath, her hair still hanging loosely down her back.

Entering the kitchen, she laid the fire, lighted it, and set about the business of getting breakfast, only pausing to sip a cup of coffee. This she drank standing at the window, her eyes fixed upon the distant grey blur of ocean that formed the horizon of her world. Suddenly her gaze grew more intent; a dull light flickered in her eyes. She had seen a sail upon the far water, a draggled moth struggling through the rain. . . .

"There, now, Allie, you've burnt the bacon! Thought I smelled it scorchin'."

Jim Baird, in shirt, trousers and grey cotton socks, stood sniffing in the doorway. Having justified his suspicions, he shuffled forward, grumbling.

"Just like you," he muttered, "always lookin' out the window and not mindin' your housework——"

She did not seem to hear the familiar arraignment. Her eyes were still bright with looking out of the window.

"I thought I saw a sail, Jim."

"Pshaw! What if you did? Ain't nothin' to get excited about, is it?"

Still she did not heed the indictment in his tone.

"Look, Jim, isn't that a schooner out there—off the Point?"

Jim looked, obviously to arm himself with a denial.

"I don't see no sail," he stated, positively. Allie smiled, a slow terrible smile.

"You never see the things I see, do you, Jim?"

"I don't see no schooner off the Point, not in this weather. And you don't neither, though you're always sayin' you do. Soon's you get a little mite fidgety, you begin seeing ships off the Point. Ain't you never forgot——"

He stopped, sobered by the expression on her face, and returned querulously to the first charge against her.

"You always was careless and wasteful, Allie," he complained, prodding the defunct bacon with a mournful forefinger. "Careless and wasteful—with bacon costin' what it does."

"It doesn't cost as much as whiskey!"

"Now, Allie——"

"Whiskey's the thing that has ruined you, Jim Baird; not my carelessness."

"Well, now, I ain't allowin' that I'm ruined, Allie. The farm still pays expenses, and a little mite over. And as for what you said—you know I ain't no heavy drinker."

"I wish to God you were! I wish you'd go out and get drunk like a man, and come home and beat me—if you wanted to! It's this everlastin' takin' it, takin' it, takin' it behind my back . . . and then lyin' to yourself to ease your conscience."

"Now, Allie, you know that ain't true. You know I'm subject to colds. The doctor said a drop or two wouldn't hurt me——"

"He didn't say to drink a bottle a week!"

"I ain't drunk a bottle. There's some . . . Now,

Allie, you know I need a tonic. This house's chilled through. The weather's murd'rous, plain murd'rous."

"Don't say that word!"

She stood over him, her bosom heaving, a pitiful frightened helplessness in her eyes; it was as though she recognised her growing inability to struggle against fate.

Jim Baird looked at her with the faint bravado that is the invariable cloak of cowardice; then he sat down at the table and began to eat, after the manner of his kind.

Allie watched him with a strange horror, a cumulative loathing that was as new in its expression as it was old in its origin. He ate like a beast.

It seemed that this week of bad weather was bringing to the surface many of her hidden emotions, her secret opinions, her long-concealed hatreds. The endless drip of the rain had begun to wear upon her calloused spirit; to rasp her nerves. She could not remember when she had been shut up with him, under one roof, for such a long time before. She wished that he had not said it was murderous weather.

After breakfast he went into the front room—a pathetically drooping chamber filled with ornaments that belied their mission of cheer; the chamber in which was gathered the concentrated dreariness of that house.

From a small cabinet he took a bottle, and drank—not recklessly but rather stingily, as though fearful of imbibing more than was strictly necessary to his

intoxication. . . . After which he filled his pipe and sat down by the window.

Allie moved slowly about the kitchen, prolonging as far as possible the washing of the dishes. At last she picked up the carving knife, a long, sharp-bladed affair, and began to scour it with trembling hands. There was an appalling tumult in her heart. The frightened look had returned to her eyes.

Suddenly she lifted her head. The knife fell clattering to the floor. With an air of grim determination she walked into the front room and sat down at her husband's side.

"Jim—I—want—to talk to you."

The peaceful vacuity of Jim Baird's countenance gave place to an uncontrollable peevishness; but he managed an artificial smile.

"All right, Allie, talk ahead. I guess you're lonesome—is that it?"

"That's it, Jim. I'm lonesome. And it doesn't seem right, somehow. It doesn't seem natural. We're husband and wife, Jim, and—we ought—to—talk—more. We ought to talk about——"

"The weather?"

"God—no!"

"Then what, Allie?"

She shook her head hopelessly.

"What do other husbands and wives talk about, when they're shut in together? Are they all like this? If they are, then they're nothing but *prisoners*!"

"Now, Allie——"



"You've got to talk to me, Jim. You've got to find something we can share, something we can take an interest in. All our lives we've gone along like this. We're strangers, after eighteen years, and it's . . . killing me! Oh, Jim, if you'd only try to be a man! If you'd only quit drinking, and go to work again. I mean *real work*, work that *means* something. I'll help you, Jim! I'll work with you——"

"Why, Allie, what's come over you? Ain't you got three meals a day, and a good bed to sleep in?"

"Yes, but that's not living. That's just keeping your body warm. I want something else, something I can look forward to—a trip to Portland maybe, or a new dress, or one of those little autos that don't cost so much, that I could run myself——"

"An automobile! *An automobile!* Ha! Ha! Ha! Allie Baird wants an automobile. That's what it's all about, eh? I knew there was somethin' on your mind besides the weather. An automobile! God A'mighty, ain't I got troubles enough, without havin' a spendthrift wife?"

He had risen from his chair, and was facing her in a sullen fury. She drew back slowly, her arm half lifted as though to ward off a blow. But still she clung to the hopeless dream of making him see, of making him understand.

"It isn't that, Jim! I swear it isn't that! I don't care about having an auto. I only want something that we could take pleasure in—and—and——"

"You lie, Allie Baird! Git back into that kitchen,

and be thankful you ain't walkin' the streets in the rain——"

Her arms fell to her sides; a dry sob escaped her lips. She turned and went wearily from the room. . . .

In the kitchen she sank down by the window, and put her head on her arms.

It seemed as though the rain had stopped at last. In the orchard behind the rambling old farmhouse, a young girl walked with her lover. The air was sweet with the fragrance of apple-blossoms. The twilight established about them a kingdom of shadows, and infinite solitudes, where they might wander in peace and safety. . . .

The man was fair-haired, blue-eyed, with the proud carriage of a young Viking. He was sailing at day-break for Georges Banks. It was to be his last trip before they were married.

"You'll be standin' at the window," he said, tightening his arm about her waist, "and you'll see the *Swallow* roundin' the Point—you can tell her by the canvas she carries! And you'll put on the ring I gave you, for you'll know it's Hartley Taylor comin' home for his sweetheart——"

"If you shouldn't come!" she whispered, and swayed against him. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I'll come one way or another," he said. "One way or another. Wait for me always."

He went at dawn, in the *Swallow* schooner. She

stood at the window, his ring against her lips, watching his sails until they showed no more. . . .

A week later the remnants of the fishing fleet came driving home in the teeth of the gale; but Hartley Taylor did not come, though she watched the Point night and day, all the long winter through. And when the spring came again, and her heart was dead in her breast, she went down to the edge of the great water, and gave his ring to the sea. . . .

The following June, at the urgent request of both her father and mother, she married Jim Baird, who wanted a wife, and was willing to trade for one upon a purely business basis.

Allie awoke with a sigh; her glance involuntarily sought the distant headland, thrust like a welcoming hand into the sea. Was it a sail that she saw, or was it another illusion of her mind?

The ceaseless patter of rain at the window stirred her to full consciousness. Her relaxed nerves tightened. Her brain throbbed with the endless reiteration of the thought that she had been fighting against ever since the dawn.

She cooked dinner, and sat in her chair by the window while Jim Baird ate. She herself did not taste food. The carving knife still lay on the floor between them. The man picked it up, muttering something about her carelessness, and placed it on the table beside her. She did not speak nor turn her head.

He returned to the front room, renewed his miserly

dissipations; but now he drank more boldly, with a false courage born of hate. Allie's plea had shaken him from that numbing lethargy, that sensual refuge into which he had crept for shelter against the very thing she demanded so passionately—*life!* And he raged inwardly at her who had pricked him.

By night he was thoroughly drunk. When she called him to his supper he came reeling, and fell into his chair with a loud laugh that echoed mockingly through the silent house. For some moments he essayed a ghastly humour, making jests about the rain, which he likened to the Flood, vowing that it presaged the end of the world. Allie sat with her back toward him, her body rigid, her hands gripping the chair.

Finally he rose and approached her.

"You told me t' git drunk—and beat you," he snarled; and struck her on the cheek with his open hand. "Come t' th' table," he added, breathing hard. "'Tain't right t' turn your back on your husband. 'Tain't—natural."

To his own maudlin amazement she did exactly as he commanded. She sat down opposite him, leaned her elbows on the table, and looked at him with a smile. It was a smile that lighted her whole countenance, a strange radiance caused by some burning within her breast. It was as though in striking her he had kindled a slumbering spark to flame. Her eyes gleamed. Her cheeks were flushed as with a fever.

That night, for the first time in eighteen years, Allie Baird did not wash the supper dishes. As soon as he

had gone, she went upstairs and put on her white dress—the only one she owned beside her monotonous gingham. . . . Then she returned to the kitchen, blew out the lamp, and waited for Jim Baird to go to bed.

The lighthouse on the Point had begun to glow. She kept her gaze upon that distant flame. It steadied her.

The rain fell steadily, monotonously, as it had fallen for days . . . as it had fallen for ages! She heard Jim's stumbling progress up the stairs, his heavy breathing, his low-voiced growl as he cursed the dark. Still she waited, in her white dress, her hair down her back. Time, that had seemed so interminable to her that morning, was now but an inconsequential trifle.

A clock in the front room struck three, with muffled tones. She rose from her chair, picked up the long-bladed knife, and slowly mounted the stairs.

As she entered the bedroom, a reek of whiskey assailed her nostrils. She felt, rather than saw, her husband's huge bulk upon the bed. He was sleeping the deep sleep of drunkenness, and he whimpered a little as he breathed. She crept close, leaned down and kissed him.

"Poor Jim!" she whispered; then lifting the knife high in air, she drove it home.

She had reached the open window—somehow—and was kneeling before it, her arms across the sill. . . .

A ship was coming for her through the rain, a schooner with all canvas set, plunging through the

grey sea of the mist; a white shape afloat upon the air. . . .

The woman at the window smiled, and reached into her bosom for the ring her lover had given her; but the ring was not there.

Then she glanced once more at the oncoming ship, and saw Hartley Taylor standing at the lee-rail, with the ring in his hand, and the light of its single stone filling the world with glory!

*"I'll come . . . one way or another!"*

She felt the light upon her face, upon her hair . . . and held out her hands to him in greeting, crying his name across the shriveled waters!

Jim Baird awoke with a start; groaned ponderously and fell back upon his pillow.

"Still rainin', Allie?"

There was no reply. He glanced toward the window, and saw her kneeling at the sill, in a brilliant flood of sunshine—her head upon her arms and her yellow hair falling about her shoulders like so much spun gold. He began to scold her querulously.

"Now, Allie, you'll catch your death——"

Something in her stillness checked the words on his lips. He got awkwardly out of bed, his face a mottled grey, and walked slowly toward the kneeling figure.

Suddenly he halted, and stared panic-stricken at a dark stain on the floor. . . . His legs gave way beneath him. He sank into a chair, a growing horror in his eyes.

"Just like you, Allie," he moaned. "Couldn't stand a little bad weather. . . . If you'd just waited another day. . . . Sun's out now!"

He looked once more at that still figure by the window; saw the light on her hair, felt the immeasurable distance between them.

Then he began to sob weakly.





# OLD FAGS

BY

STACY AUMONIER

AUTHOR OF

THE FRIENDS—*Century Magazine*

THE TRIPLE SCARAB—*Pictorial Review*

BURNEY'S LAUGH—*Century Magazine*

THE PREPOSTEROUS PRINCESS—*Smart Set*

This remarkable literary achievement has probably caused more heartache to magazine editors than any other manuscript rejected in years. It was approved by every member of the reading staff of a magazine noted for the literary distinction of its fiction, but after a conference called specially to discuss the story, it was finally rejected. The editor of another magazine thinks "Old Fags" the best story he has read in ten years. We consider it a fortunate privilege to be allowed to print it, being confident the discerning reader, for whom this collection is published, will appreciate the unusual quality of the work.

F. S. G.

### III

#### OLD FAGS

**T**HE boys called him "Old Fags," and the reason was not hard to seek. He occupied a room in a block of tenements off Lisson Grove, bearing the somewhat grandiloquent title of Bolingbroke Buildings and, conspicuous among the many doubtful callings that occupied his time, was one in which he issued forth with a deplorable old canvas sack, which, after a day's peregrination along the gutters, he would manage to partly fill with cigar and cigarette ends. The exact means by which he managed to convert this patiently gathered garbage into the wherewithal to support his disreputable body, nobody took the trouble to inquire; nor was there any further interest aroused by the disposal of the contents of the same sack when he returned with the gleanings of dustbins, distributed thoughtfully at intervals along certain thoroughfares by a maternal Borough Council.

No one had ever penetrated to the inside of his room, but the general opinion in Bolingbroke Buildings was that he managed to live in a state of comfortable filth. And Mrs. Read, who lived in the room opposite Number 477 with her four children, was of opinion that "Old Fags 'ad 'oarded up a bit." He certainly was

never behind with the payment of the weekly three and sixpence that entitled him to the sole enjoyment of Number 475; and when the door was opened, among the curious blend of odours that issued forth, that of onions and other luxuries of this sort was undeniable. Nevertheless, he was not a popular figure in the Buildings; many, in fact, looked upon him as a social blot on the Bolingbroke escutcheon. The inhabitants were mostly labourers and their wives, charwomen and lady helps, dressmakers' assistants, and mechanics. There was a vague, tentative effort among a great body of them to be a little respectable, and among some, even to be clean. No such uncomfortable considerations hampered the movements of "Old Fags." He was frankly and ostentatiously a social derelict. He had no pride and no shame. He shuffled out in the morning, his blotchy face covered with dirt and black hair, his threadbare green clothes tattered and in rags, the toes all too visible through his forlorn-looking boots. He was rather a large man with a fat, flabby person, and a shiny face that was over-affable and bleary through a too constant attention to the gin bottle.

He had a habit of ceaseless talk. He talked and chuckled to himself all the time; he talked to every one he met in an undercurrent of jeering affability. Sometimes he would retire to his room with a gin bottle for days together and then—the walls at Bolingbroke Buildings are not very thick—he would be heard to talk and chuckle and snore alternately, until the

percolating atmosphere of stewed onions heralded the fact that "Old Fags" was shortly on the war-path again.

He would meet Mrs. Read with her children on the stairs and would mutter: "Oh! here we are again! All these dear little children. Been out for a walk, eh? Oh! these dear little children!" and he would pat one of them gaily on the head. And Mrs. Read would say: "'Ere, you, keep your filthy 'ands off my kids, you dirty old swine, or I'll catch you a swipe over the mouth!" And "Old Fags" would shuffle off muttering: "Oh, dear; oh, dear; these dear little children! Oh, dear; oh, dear." And the boys would call after him and even throw orange peel and other things at him, but nothing seemed to disturb the serenity of "Old Fags." Even when young Charlie Good threw a dead mouse, that hit him on the chin, he only said: "Oh, these Boys! These BOYS!"

Quarrels, noise and bad odours were the prevailing characteristics of Bolingbroke Buildings, and "Old Fags," though contributing in some degree to the latter quality, rode serenely through the other two in spite of multiform aggression. The penetrating intensity of his onion stew had driven two lodgers already from Number 476, and was again a source of aggravation to the present holders, old Mrs. Birdle and her daughter, Minnie.

Minnie Birdle was what was known as a "tweeny" at a house in Hyde Park Square, but she lived at home. Her mistress—to whom she had never spoken, being

engaged by the Housekeeper—was Mrs. Bastien-Melland, a lady who owned a valuable collection of little dogs. These little dogs somehow gave Minnie an unfathomable sense of respectability. She loved to talk about them. She told Mrs. Read that her mistress paid “'undreds and 'undreds of pahnds for each of them.” They were taken out every day by a groom on two leads of five,—ten highly groomed, bustling, yapping, snapping, vicious little luxuries. Some had won prizes at Dog Shows, and two men were engaged for the sole purpose of ministering to their creature comforts.

The consciousness of working in a house which furnished such an exhibition of festive cultivation brought into sharp relief the degrading social condition of her next-room neighbour. Minnie hated “Old Fags” with a bitter hatred. She even wrote to a firm of lawyers, who represented some remote landlord, and complained of the dirty habits of the old drunken wretch next door. But she never received any answer to her complaint. It was known that “Old Fags” had lived there for seven years and paid his rent regularly. Moreover, on one critical occasion, Mrs. Read, who had periods of rheumatic gout and could not work, had got into hopeless financial straits, having reached the very limit of her borrowing capacity, and being three weeks in arrears with her rent, “Old Fags” had come over and had insisted on lending her fifteen shillings! Mrs. Read eventually paid it back, and the knowledge

of the transaction further accentuated her animosity toward him.

One day "Old Fags" was returning from his dubious round and was passing through Hyde Park Square with his canvas bag slung over his back, when he ran into the cortège of little dogs under the control of Meads, the groom.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" muttered "Old Fags" to himself. "What dear little dogs! H'm! What dear little dogs!"

A minute later Minnie Birdle ran up the area steps and gave Meads a bright smile. "Good-night, Mr. Meads," she said.

Mr. Meads looked at her and said: "'Ullo! you off?"

"Yes!" she answered.

"Oh, well," he said, "good-night! Be good!" They both sniggered, and Minnie hurried down the street. Before she reached Lisson Grove "Old Fags" had caught her up.

"I say," he said, getting into her stride, "what dear little dogs those are! Oh, dear! what dear little dogs!"

Minnie turned, and when she saw him her face flushed, and she said: "Oh, you go to Hell!" with which unladylike expression she darted across the road and was lost to sight.

"Oh, these women!" said "Old Fags" to himself, "these WOMEN!"

It often happened, thereafter, that "Old Fags'" business carried him in the neighbourhood of Hyde

Park Square, and he ran into the little dogs. One day he even ventured to address Meads and to congratulate him on the beauty of his canine protégées, an attention that elicited a very unsympathetic response; a response, in fact, that amounted to being told "to clear off."

The incident of "Old Fags" running into this society was entirely accidental. It was due, in part, to the fact that the way lay through there to a tract of land in Paddington that "Old Fags" seemed to find peculiarly attractive. It was a neglected strip of ground by the railway, that butted at one end onto a canal. It would have made quite a good siding, but that it seemed somehow to have been overlooked by the Railway Company, and to have become a dumping ground for tins and old refuse from the houses in the neighbourhood of Harrow Road. "Old Fags" would spend hours there alone with his canvas bag.

When the winter came on there was a great wave of what the papers would call economic unrest. There were strikes in three great industries, a political upheaval, and a severe tightening of the Money Market. All of these misfortunes reacted on Bolingbroke Buildings. The dwellers became even more impecunious, and consequently more quarrelsome, more noisy and more malodorous. Rents were all in arrears, ejections were the order of the day, and borrowing became a tradition rather than an actuality. Want and hunger brooded over the dejected Buildings. But still "Old



Fags " came and went, carrying his shameless gin and permeating the passages with his onion stews.

Old Mrs. Birdle became bedridden and the support of Room Number 476 fell on the shoulders of Minnie. The wages of a "twecny" are not excessive, and the way in which she managed to support herself and her invalid mother must have excited the wonder of the other dwellers in the building, if they had not had more pressing affairs of their own to wonder about. Minnie was a short, sallow little thing with a rather full figure, and heavy grey eyes that somehow conveyed a sense of sleeping passion. She had a certain instinct for dress, a knack of putting some trinket in the right place, and of always being neat. Mrs. Bastien-Melland had one day asked who she was. On being informed, her curiosity did not prompt her to push the matter further, and she did not speak to her; but the incident gave Minnie a better standing in the domestic household at Hyde Park Square. It was probably this attention that caused Meads, the head dog groom, to cast an eye in her direction. It is certain that he did so, and, moreover, on a certain Thursday evening had taken her to a Cinema performance in the Edgware Road. Such attention naturally gave rise to discussion; and, alas, to jealousy; for there was an under house maid, and even a Lady's maid, who were not impervious to the attentions of the good-looking groom.

When Mrs. Bastien-Melland went to Egypt in January, she took only three of the small dogs with her,

for she could not be bothered with the society of a groom, and three dogs were as many as her two maids could spare time for, after devoting their energies to Mrs. Bastien-Melland's toilette. Consequently, Meads was left behind, and was held directly responsible for seven, five Chows and two Pekinese, or, as he expressed it, over a thousand pounds' worth of dogs. It was a position of enormous responsibility. They had to be fed on the very best food, all carefully prepared and cooked, and in small quantities. They had to be taken for regular exercise, and washed in specially prepared condiments. Moreover, at the slightest symptom of indisposition he was to telephone to Sir Andrew Fossiter, the great veterinary specialist in Hanover Square. It is not to be wondered at that Meads became a person of considerable standing and envy, and that little Minnie Birdle was intensely flattered when he occasionally condescended to look in her direction. She had been in Mrs. Bastien-Melland's service now for seven months, and the attentions of the dog groom had not only been a matter of general observation, for some time past, but had become a subject of reckless mirth and innuendo among the other servants.

One night she was hurrying home. Her mother had been rather worse than usual of late, and she was carrying a few scraps that the cook had given her. It was a wretched night and she was not feeling well herself: a mood of tired dejection possessed her. She crossed a drab street off Lisson Grove and, as she

reached the curb, her eye lighted on "Old Fags." He did not see her. He was walking along the gutter, patting the road occasionally with his stick. She had not spoken to him since the occasion we have mentioned. For once he was not talking—his eyes were fixed in listless apathy on the road. As he passed, she caught the angle of his chin silhouetted against the window of a shop. For the rest of her walk the haunting vision of that chin beneath the drawn cheeks, and the brooding hopelessness of those sunken eyes, kept recurring to her. Perhaps, in some remote past, he had been as good to look upon as Meads, the groom! Perhaps some one had cared for him! She tried to push this thought from her, but some chord in her nature seemed to have been awakened and to vibrate with an unaccountable sympathy toward this undesirable fellow lodger.

She hurried home, and in the night was ill. She could not go to Mrs. Melland's for three days and she wanted the money badly. When she got about again she was subject to fainting fits and sickness. On one such occasion, as she was going upstairs at the Buildings, she felt faint and leant against the wall just as "Old Fags" was going up.

He stopped and said: "Hullo, now what are we doing? Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" And she said: "It's all right, old 'un." These were the kindest words she had ever spoken to "Old Fags."

During the next month there were strange symptoms about Minnie Birdle that caused considerable

comment, and there were occasions when old Mrs. Birdle pulled herself together, and became the active partner and waited on Minnie. On one such occasion, "Old Fags" came home late and, after drawing a cork, varied his usual programme of talking and snoring by singing in a maudlin key, and old Mrs. Birdle came banging at his door and shrieked out: "Stop your row, you old —. My daughter is ill. Can't you hear?"

And "Old Fags" came to his door and blinked at her and said: "Ill, is she? Oh, dear! oh, dear! Would she like some stew, eh?"

And old Mrs. Birdle said: "No, she don't want any of your muck," and bundled back. But they did not hear any more of "Old Fags" that night, or any other night when Minnie came home queer.

Early in March Minnie got the sack from Hyde Park Square. Mrs. Melland was still away—having decided to winter in Rome—but the Housekeeper assumed the responsibility of this action, and in writing to Mrs. Melland, justified the course she had taken by saying that "she could not expect the other maids to work in the same house with an unmarried girl in that condition." Mrs. Melland, whose letter in reply was full of the serious illness of poor little Annisette, one of the Chows, that had suffered in Egypt on account of a maid giving it too much rice, with its boned chicken; and how much better it had been in Rome under the treatment of Dr. Lascati,—made no special reference to the question of Minnie Birdle, only

saying that "she was *so* sorry if Mrs. Bellingham was having trouble with these tiresome servants."

The spring came, and the summer, and the two inhabitants of Room 476 eked out their miserable existence. One day Minnie would pull herself together and get a day's charring and occasionally Mrs. Birdle would struggle along to a laundry in Maida Vale, where a benevolent proprietress would pay her one shilling and threepence to do a day's ironing; for the old lady was rather neat with her hands. And once, when things were very desperate, the brother of a nephew from Walthamstow turned up. He was a small cabinet-maker by trade, and he agreed to allow them three shillings a week, "till things righted themselves a bit." But nothing was seen of Meads, the groom. One night Minnie was rather worse and the idea occurred to her that she would like to send a message to him. It was right that he should know. He had made no attempt to see her since she had left Mrs. Melland's service. She lay awake thinking of him and wondering how she could send a message, when she suddenly thought of "Old Fags." He had been quiet of late; whether the demand for cigarette ends was abating and he could not afford the luxuries that their disposal seemed to supply, or whether he was keeping quiet for any ulterior reason, she was not able to determine. In the morning she sent her mother across to ask him if he would "oblige by calling at Hyde Park Square and asking Mr. Meads if he would oblige by calling at 476 Bolingbroke Buildings, to see Miss Birdle."

There is no record of how "Old Fags" delivered this message, but it is known that that same afternoon Mr. Meads did call. He left about three-thirty in a great state of perturbation, and in a very bad temper. He passed "Old Fags" on the stairs, and the only comment he made was: "I never have any luck! God help me!" And he did not return, although he had apparently promised to do so.

In a few weeks' time the position of the occupants of Room 476 became desperate. It was, in fact, a desperate time all round. Work was scarce and money scarcer. Waves of ill-temper and depression swept Bolingbroke Buildings. Mrs. Read had gone—Heaven knows where. Even "Old Fags" seemed at the end of his tether. True, he still managed to secure his inevitable bottle, but the stews became scarcer and less potent. All Mrs. Birdle's time and energy were taken up in nursing Minnie, and the two somehow existed on the money—now increased to four shillings a week—which the sympathetic cabinet-maker from Walthamstow allowed them. The question of rent was shelved. Four shillings a week for two people means ceaseless, gnawing hunger. The widow and her daughter lost pride and hope, and further messages to Mr. Meads failed to elicit any response. The widow became so desperate that she even asked "Old Fags" one night if he could spare a little stew for her daughter who was starving. The pungent odour of the hot food was too much for her.

"Old Fags" came to the door: "Oh, dear! Oh,

dear!" he said, "what trouble there is! Let's see what we can do!" He messed about for some time and then took it across to them. It was a strange concoction. Meat that it would have been difficult to know what to ask for at a butcher's, and many bones, but the onions seemed to pull it together. To any one starving it was good. After that it became a sort of established thing: whenever "Old Fags" *had* a stew, he sent some over to the widow and daughter. But apparently things were not going too well in the cigarette-end trade, for the stews became more and more intermittent, and sometimes were desperately "boney."

And then one night a climax was reached. "Old Fags" was awakened in the night by fearful screams. There was a district nurse in the next room, and also a student from a great hospital. No one knows how it all affected "Old Fags." He went out at a very unusual hour in the early morning, and seemed more garrulous and meandering in his speech. He stopped the widow in the passage and mumbled incomprehensible solicitude.

Minnie was very ill for three days, but she recovered, faced by the insoluble proposition of feeding three mouths, instead of two, and two of them requiring enormous quantities of milk. This terrible crisis brought out many good qualities in various people. The cabinet-maker sent ten shillings extra, and others came forward as though driven by some race instinct. "Old Fags" disappeared for ten days after that. It was owing to an unfortunate incident in Hyde Park,

when he insisted on sleeping on a flower bed with a gin bottle under his left arm, and on account of the unreasonable attitude that he took up toward a policeman in the matter. When he returned things were assuming their normal course. Mrs. Birdle's greeting was: "'Ullo, old 'un, we've missed your stoos."

"Old Fags" had undoubtedly secured a more stable position in the eyes of the Birdles, and one day he was even allowed to see the baby. He talked to it from the door.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" he said. "What a beautiful little baby! What a dear little baby! Oh, dear! oh, dear!" The baby shrieked with unrestrained terror at sight of him, but that night some more stew was sent in.

Then the autumn came on. People, whose romantic instincts had been touched at the arrival of the child, gradually lost interest and fell away. The cabinet-maker from Walthamstow wrote a long letter, saying that after next week the payment of the four shillings would have to stop, he hoped he had been of some help in their trouble, but that things were going on all right now; of course he had to think of his own family first, and so on.

The lawyers of the remote landlord, who was assiduously killing stags in Scotland, regretted that their client could not see his way to allow any further delay in the matter of the payment of rent due. The position of the Birdle family became once more desperate. Old Mrs. Birdle had become frailer, and



though Minnie could now get about, she found work difficult to obtain, owing to people's demand for a character from the last place. Their thoughts once more reverted to Meads, and Minnie lay in wait for him one morning as he was taking the dogs out. There was a very trying scene ending in a very vulgar quarrel, and Minnie came home and cried all the rest of the day and through half the night.

"Old Fags'" stews became scarcer and less palatable. He, too, seemed in dire straits.

We now come to an incident that, we are ashamed to say, owes its inception to the effect of alcohol. It was a wretched morning in late October, bleak and foggy. The blue-grey corridors of Bolingbroke Buildings seemed to exude damp. The strident voices of the unkempt children, quarrelling in the courtyard below, permeated the whole Buildings. The strange odour, that was its characteristic, lay upon it like the foul breath of some evil god. All its inhabitants seemed hungry, wretched and vile. Their lives of constant protest seemed, for the moment, lulled to a sullen indifference, whilst they huddled behind their gloomy doors and listened to the raucous railings of their offspring.

The widow Birdle and her daughter sat silently in their room. The child was asleep. It had had its milk, and it would have to have its milk, whatever happened. The crumbs from the bread the women had had at breakfast lay ungathered on the bare table. They were both hungry and very desperate. There

was a knock at the door. Minnie went to it, and there stood "Old Fags." He leered at them meekly and under his arm carried a gin bottle, three parts full.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he said. "What a dreadful day! What a dreadful day! Will you have a little drop of gin to comfort you? Now! What do you say?"

Minnie looked at her mother—in other days the door would have been slammed in his face, but "Old Fags" had certainly been kind in the matter of stews. They asked him to sit down. Then old Mrs. Birdle did accept just a tiny drop of gin, and they both persuaded Minnie to have a little. Now neither of the women had had food of any worth for days, and the gin went straight to their heads. It was already in "Old Fags" head, firmly established. The three immediately became garrulous. They all talked volubly and intimately. The women railed "Old Fags" about his dirt, but allowed that he had "a good 'eart." They talked longingly and lovingly about "his stoos" and "Old Fags" said: "Well, my dears, you shall have the finest stoo you've ever had in your lives tonight."

He repeated this nine times, only each time the whole sentence sounded like one word.

Then the conversation drifted to the child, and the hard lot of parents, and by a natural sequence to Meads, its father. Meads was discussed with considerable bitterness, and the constant reiteration of the threat by the women that they meant to 'ave the Lor on 'im all right, mingled with the jeering sophis-

tries of "Old Fags" on the genelman's behaviour, and the impossibility of expecting a dog groom to be a sportsman, lasted a considerable time. "Old Fags" talked expansively about leaving it to him, and somehow as he stood there with his large, puffy figure, looming up in the dimly lighted room, and waving his long arms, he appeared to the women a figure of portentous significance. In the eyes of the women he typified powers they had not dreamt of. Under the veneer of his hidebound depravity Minnie seemed to detect some slow moving force trying to assert itself.

He meandered on in a vague monologue, using terms and expressions they did not know the meaning of. He gave the impression of some fettered animal, launching a fierce indictment against the fact of its life. At last he took up the gin bottle and moved to the door and then leered round the room.

"You shall have the finest stoo you've ever had in your life tonight, my dears."

He repeated this seven times again and then went heavily out.

That afternoon a very amazing fact was observed by several inhabitants of Bolingbroke Buildings. "Old Fags" washed his face! He went out about three o'clock without his sack. His face had certainly been cleaned up and his clothes seemed in some mysterious fashion to hold together. He went across Lisbon Grove and made for Hyde Park Square. He hung about for nearly an hour at the corner, and then he saw a man come up the area steps of a house

on the south side and walk rapidly away. "Old Fags" followed him. He took a turning sharp to the left through a Mews, and entered a narrow street at the end. There he entered a deserted-looking pub, kept by an ex-butler and his wife. He passed right through to a room at the back and called for some beer. Before it was brought, "Old Fags" was seated at the next table ordering gin.

"Dear, oh, dear! what a wretched day!" said "Old Fags."

The groom grunted assent. But "Old Fags" was not to be put off by mere indifference. He broke ground on one or two subjects that interested the groom, one subject in particular being Dog. He seemed to have a profound knowledge of Dog, and before Mr. Meads quite realised what was happening he was trying gin in his beer at "Old Fags'" expense.

The groom was feeling particularly morose that afternoon. His luck seemed out. Bookmakers had appropriated several half-crowns that he sorely begrudged, and he had other expenses. The beer-gin mixture comforted him, and the rambling eloquence of the old fool, who seemed disposed to be content paying for drinks and talking, fitted in with his mood. They drank and talked for a full hour, and at length got to a subject that all men get to sooner or later if they drink and talk long enough—the subject of Woman.

Mr. Meads became confiding and philosophic. He talked of women in general and what triumphs and

adventures he had had among them in particular. But what a trial and tribulation they had been to him in spite of all! "Old Fags" winked knowingly and was splendidly comprehensive and tolerant of Meads' peccadillos.

"It's all a game," said Meads. "You've got to manage 'em. There ain't much I don't know, old bird!" Then suddenly "Old Fags" leaned forward in the dark room and said: "No, Mr. Meads, but you ought to play the game, you know. Oh, dear, yes!"

"What do you mean, *Mister Meads*?" said that gentleman sharply.

"Minnie Birdle, eh, you haven't mentioned Minnie Birdle yet!" said "Old Fags."

"What the Devil are you talking about?" said Meads drunkenly.

"She's starving," said "Old Fags," "starving, wretched, alone with her old mother and your child. Oh, dear! yes, it's terrible!"

Meads' eyes flashed with a sullen frenzy, but fear was gnawing at his heart, and he felt more disposed to placate this mysterious old man than to quarrel with him.

"I tell you I have no luck," he said after a pause.

"Old Fags" looked at him gloomily and ordered some more gin. When it was brought he said: "You ought to play the game, you know, Mr. Meads. After all—luck? Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Would you rather be the woman? Five shillings a week, you know, would——"

"No, I'm damned if I do!" cried Meads fiercely. "It's all right for all these women—Gawd! How do I know if it's true? Look here, old bird, do you know I'm already done in for two five bobs a week, eh! One up in Norfolk and the other at Enfield. Ten shillings a week of my —— money goes to these blasted women. No fear, no more, I'm through with it!"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" said "Old Fags," and he moved a little further into the shadow of the room and watched the groom out of the depths of his sunken eyes.

But Meads' courage was now fortified by the fumes of a large quantity of fiery alcohol, and he spoke witheringly of women in general and seemed disposed to quarrel if "Old Fags" disputed his right to place them in the position that Meads considered their right and natural position. But "Old Fags" gave no evidence of taking up the challenge—on the contrary he seemed to suddenly shift his ground. He grinned and leered and nodded at Meads' string of coarse sophistry, and suddenly he touched him on the arm and looked round the room and said very confidentially:

"Oh, dear! yes, Mr. Meads. Don't take too much to heart what I said," and then he sniffed and whispered: "I could put you on to a very nice thing, Mr. Meads. I could introduce you to a lady I know would take a fancy to you, and you to her. Oh, dear, yes!"

Meads pricked up his ears like a fox-terrier and his small eyes glittered.

"Oh!" he said. "Are you one of those, eh, old bird? Who is she?"

"Old Fags" took out a piece of paper and fumbled with a pencil. He then wrote down a name and address somewhere at Shepherds Bush.

"What's a good time to call?" said Meads.

"Between six and seven," answered "Old Fags."

"Oh, Hell!" said Meads. "I can't do it. I've got to get back and take the dogs out at half-past five, old bird. From half-past five to half-past six. The missus is back, she'll kick up a hell of a row."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" said "Old Fags." What a pity! The young lady is going away, too!" He thought for a moment and then an idea seemed to strike him. "Look here, would you like me to meet you and take the dogs round the Park till you return?"

"What!" said Meads, "trust you with a thousand pounds' worth of dogs! Not much."

"No, no, of course not, I hadn't thought of that!" said "Old Fags" humbly.

Meads looked at him, and it is very difficult to tell what it was about the old man that gave him a sudden feeling of complete trust. The ingenuity of his speech, the ingratiating confidence that a mixture of beer-gin gives, tempered by the knowledge that famous pedigree Pekinese would be almost impossible to dispose of, perhaps it was a combination of these motives. In any case a riotous impulse drove him to fall in with "Old

Fags' " suggestion, and he made the appointment for half-past five.

Evening had fallen early, and a fine rain was driving in fitful gusts when the two met at the corner of Hyde Park. There were the ten little dogs on their lead, and Meads with a cap pulled close over his eyes.

" Oh, dear! oh, dear!" cried " Old Fags " as he approached. " What dear little dogs! What dear little dogs!"

Meads handed the lead over to " Old Fags " and asked more precise instructions of the way to get to the address.

" What are you wearing that canvas sack inside your coat for, old bird, eh? " asked Meads when these instructions had been given.

" Oh, my dear sir," said " Old Fags," " if you had the asthma like I get it! and no underclothes on these damp days! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" He wheezed drearily.

Meads gave him one or two more exhortations about the extreme care and tact he was to observe.

" Be very careful with that little Chow on the left lead. 'E's got his coat on, see? 'E's 'ad a chill and you must keep 'im on the move. Gently, see? "

" Oh, dear! oh, dear! poor little chap! What's his name? " said " Old Fags."

" Pelleas," answered Mr. Meads.

" Oh, poor little Pelleas! Poor little Pelleas! Come along, you won't be too long, Mr. Meads, will you? "



"You bet I won't," said the groom, and nodding he crossed the road rapidly and mounting a Shepherd's Bush motor 'bus, he set out on his journey to an address that didn't exist.

"Old Fags" ambled slowly round the Park snuffing and talking to the dogs. He gauged the time when Meads would be somewhere about Queens Road, then he ambled slowly back to the point from which he had started. With extreme care he piloted the small army across the High Road and led them in the direction of Paddington. He drifted with leisurely confidence through a maze of small streets. Several people stopped and looked at the dogs and the boys barked and mimicked them, but nobody took the trouble to look at "Old Fags." At length he came to a district where their presence seemed more conspicuous. Rows of squalid houses and advertisement hoardings. He slightly increased his pace, and a very stout policeman standing outside a funeral furnisher's glanced at him with a vague suspicion. In strict accordance, however, with an ingrained officialism, that hates to act "without instructions," he let the cortège pass.

"Old Fags" wandered through a wretched street that seemed entirely peopled by children. Several of them came up and followed the dogs.

"Dear little dogs, aren't they? Oh my, yes, dear little dogs!" he said to the children.

At last he reached a broad, gloomy thoroughfare with low, irregular buildings on one side, and an interminable length of hoardings on the other, that

screened a strip of land by the railway land that harboured a wilderness of tins and garbage. "Old Fags" led the dogs along by the hoarding. It was very dark. Three children who had been following, tired of the pastime and drifted away. He went along once more. There was a gap in a hoarding on which was notified that "Pogram's Landaulettes could be hired for the evening at an inclusive fee of two guineas. Telephone 47901 Mayfair." The meagre light from a street lamp thirty yards away revealed a colossal coloured picture of a very beautiful young man and woman stepping out of a car and entering a gorgeous restaurant, having evidently just enjoyed the advantage of this peerless luxury.

"Old Fags" went on another forty yards and then returned. There was no one in sight.

"Oh, dear little dogs!" he said. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! what dear little dogs! Just through here, my pretty pets. Gentle, Pelicas! gently, very gently! There, there, there! Oh, what dear little dogs!"

He stumbled forward through the quagmire of desolation, picking his way as though familiar with every inch of ground, to the further corner where it was even darker, and where the noise of shunting freight trains drowned every other murmur of the night.

It was eight o'clock when "Old Fags" reached his room in Bolingbroke Buildings, carrying his heavily laden sack across his shoulders. The child in Room 476 had been peevish and fretful all the afternoon, and

the two women were lying down, exhausted. They heard "Old Fags" come in. He seemed very busy, banging about with bottles and tins and alternately coughing and wheezing. But soon the potent aroma of onions reached their nostrils and they knew he was preparing to keep his word.

At nine o'clock he staggered across with a steaming saucepan of hot stew. In contrast to the morning's conversation, which though devoid of self-consciousness had taken on at times an air of moribund analysis, making little stabs at fundamental things, the evening passed off on a note of almost joyous levity. The stew was extremely good to the starving women, and "Old Fags" developed a vein of fantastic pleasantry. He talked unceasingly, sometimes on things they understood, sometimes on matters of which they were entirely ignorant; and sometimes he appeared to them obtuse, maudlin and incoherent. Nevertheless, he brought to their room a certain light-hearted raillery that had never visited it before. No mention was made of Meads.

The only blemish to the serenity of this bizarre supper party was that "Old Fags" developed intervals of violent coughing, intervals when he had to walk around the room and beat his chest. These fits had the unfortunate result of waking the baby.

When this undesirable result had occurred for the fourth time, "Old Fags" said: "Oh, dear! oh, dear! this won't do. Oh, no, this won't do. I must go back to my hotel!" A remark that caused paroxysms of

mirth to old Mrs. Birdle. Nevertheless, "Old Fags" retired, and it was then just on eleven o'clock.

The women went to bed, and all through the night Minnie heard the old man coughing.

Meads jumped off the 'bus at Shepherds Bush and hurried in the direction that "Old Fags" had instructed him. He asked three people for the Pomeranian Road before an errand boy told him that he believed it was somewhere off Giles Avenue; but at Giles Avenue no one seemed to know it. He retraced his steps in a very bad temper and inquired again. Five other people had never heard of it. So he went to a post office, and a young lady in charge informed him that there was no such road in the neighbourhood. He tried other roads whose names vaguely resembled it, then he came to the conclusion that "that blamed old fool had made some silly mistake."

He took a 'bus back with a curious gnawing fear at the pit of his stomach, a fear that he kept thrusting back, he dare not allow himself to contemplate it. It was nearly seven-thirty when he got back to Hyde Park, and his eye quickly scanned the length of railing near which "Old Fags" was to be. Immediately that he saw no sign of him or the little dogs, a horrible feeling of physical sickness assailed him. The whole truth flashed through in his mind. He saw the fabric of his life crumble to dust. He was conscious of visions of past acts and misdeeds tumbling over each other in

a furious kaleidoscope. The groom was terribly frightened. Mrs. Bastien-Melland would be in at eight o'clock to dinner, and the first thing she would ask for would be the little dogs. They were never supposed to go out after dark, but he had been busy that afternoon and arranged to take them out later. How was he to account for himself and their loss? He visualised himself in a dock, and all sorts of other horrid things coming up—a forged character, an affair in Norfolk, and another at Enfield, and a little trouble with a bookmaker seven years ago. For he felt convinced that the little dogs had gone forever, and “Old Fags” with them.

He cursed blindly in his soul at his foul luck and the wretched inclination that had lured him to drink “beer-gin” with the old thief. Forms of terrific vengeance passed through his mind, if he should meet the old devil again. In the meantime what should he do? He had never even thought of making “Old Fags” give him any sort of address. He dared not go back to Hyde Park Square without the dogs. He ran breathlessly up and down, peering in every direction. Eight o'clock came and there was still no sign. Suddenly he remembered Minnie Birdle. He remembered that the old ruffian had mentioned, and seemed to know, Minnie Birdle. It was a connection that he had hoped to have wiped out of his life, but the case was desperate. Curiously enough, during his desultory courtship of Minnie, he had never been to her home; the only occasion when he *had* visited it, was after the birth of the

child. He had done so under the influence of three pints of beer, and he hadn't the faintest recollection now of the number or the block. He hurried there, however, in feverish trepidation.

Now Bolingbroke Buildings harbour some eight hundred people; and it is a remarkable fact that, although the Birdles had lived there about a year, of the eleven people that Meads asked, not one happened to know the name. People develop a profound sense of self-concentration in Bolingbroke Buildings.

Meads wandered up all the stairs and through the slate-tile passages. Twice he passed their door without knowing it—on the first occasion, only five minutes after "Old Fags" had carried a saucepan of steaming stew from Number 475 to Number 476. At ten o'clock he gave it up. He had four shillings on him, and he adjourned to a small "pub" hard by, and ordered a tankard of ale, and as an afterthought three pennyworth of gin which he mixed in it. Probably he thought that this mixture, which was so directly responsible for the train of tragic circumstance that encompassed him, might continue to act in some manner toward a more desirable conclusion.

It did, indeed, drive him to action of a sort, for he sat there drinking and smoking Navy Cut cigarettes, and by degrees he evolved a most engaging, but impossible, story, of being lured to the river by three men and chloroformed; and when he came to, finding that the dogs and the men had gone. He drank a further quantity of beer-gin, and rehearsed his rôle in

detail, and at length brought himself to the point of facing Mrs. Melland. . . .

It was the most terrifying ordeal of his life. The servants frightened him for a start. They almost shrieked when they saw him and drew back. Mrs. Bastien-Melland had left word that he was to go to a small breakfast-room in the basement directly he came in, and she would come and see him. There was a small dinner party on that evening and an agitated game of bridge. Meads had not stood on the hearth-rug of the breakfast-room two minutes before he heard the foreboding swish of skirts, the door burst open, and Mrs. Bastien-Melland stood before him, a thing of penetrating perfumes, high-lights and trepidation.

She just said, "Well!" and fixed her hard, bright eyes on him.

Meads launched forth into his impossible story, but he dared not look at her. He tried to gather together the pieces of the tale he had so carefully rehearsed in the pub, but he felt like some helpless bark at the mercy of a hostile battle fleet; the searchlight of Mrs. Melland's cruel eyes was concentrated on him; while a flotilla of small diamonds on her heaving bosom winked and glittered with a dangerous insolence.

He was stumbling over a phrase about the effects of chloroform when he became aware that Mrs. Melland was not listening to the matter of his story, she was only concerned with the manner. Her lips were set and her straining eyes insisted on catching his.

He looked full at her and caught his breath and stopped.

Mrs. Melland still staring at him was moving slowly to the door. A moment of panic seized him. He mumbled something, and also moved toward the door. Mrs. Melland was first to grip the handle. Meads made a wild dive and seized her wrist. But Mrs. Bastien-Melland came of a hard-riding Yorkshire family. She did not lose her head. She struck him across the mouth with her flat hand, and as he reeled back she opened the door and called to the servants.

Suddenly Meads remembered that the room had a French window onto the garden. He pushed her clumsily against the door and sprang across the room. He clutched wildly at the bolts while Mrs. Melland's voice was ringing out:

"Catch that man! Hold him! Catch thief!"

But before the other servants had had time to arrive he managed to get through the door and to pull it after him. His hand was bleeding with cuts from broken glass, but he leapt the wall and got into the shadow of some shrubs three gardens away.

He heard whistles blowing and the dominant voice of Mrs. Melland, directing a hue-and-cry. He rested some moments, then panic seized him and he laboured over another wall and found the passage of a semi-detached house. A servant opened a door and looked out and screamed. He struck her wildly and unreasonably on the shoulder, and rushed up some steps



and got into a front garden. There was no one there, and he darted into the street and across the road.

In a few minutes he was lost in a labyrinth of back streets and laughing hysterically to himself.

He had two shillings and eightpence on him. He spent fourpence of this on whiskey, and then another fourpence just before the pubs closed. He struggled vainly to formulate some definite plan of campaign. The only point that seemed terribly clear to him was that he must get away. He knew Mrs. Meland only too well. She would spare no trouble in hunting him down. She would exact the uttermost farthing. It meant gaol and ruin. The obvious impediment to getting away was that he had no money and no friends. He had not sufficient strength of character to face a tramp-life. He had lived too long in the society of the pampered Pekinese. He loved comfort.

Out of the simmering tumult of his soul grew a very definite passion—the passion of hate. He developed a vast, bitter, scorching hatred for the person who had caused this ghastly climax to his unfortunate career—"Old Fags." He went over the whole incidents of the day again, rapidly recalling every phase of "Old Fags'" conversation and manner. What a blind fool he was not to have seen through the filthy old swine's game! But what had he done with the dogs? Sold the lot for a pound, perhaps! The idea made Meads shiver. He slouched through the streets harbouring his pariah-like lust.

We will not attempt to record the psychologic changes that harassed the soul of Mr. Meads during the next two days and nights; the ugly passions that stirred him and beat their wings against the night; the tentative intuitions urging toward some vague new start; the various compromises he made with himself, his weakness and inconsistency that found him bereft of any quality other than the sombre shadow of some ill-conceived revenge. We will only note that on the evening of the day we mention, he turned up at Bolingbroke Buildings. His face was haggard and drawn, his eyes bloodshot and his clothes tattered and muddy. His appearance and demeanour were, unfortunately, not so alien to the general character of Bolingbroke Buildings as to attract any particular attention, and he slunk like a wolf through the dreary passages, and watched the people come and go.

It was at about a quarter to ten, when he was going along a passage in Block "F," that he suddenly saw Minnie Birdle come out of one door and go into another. His small eyes glittered and he went on tip-toe. He waited till Minnie was quite silent in her room and then he went stealthily to Room 475. He tried the handle and it gave. He opened the door and peered in. There was a cheap tin lamp guttering on a box, that dimly revealed a room of repulsive wretchedness. The furniture seemed to mostly consist of bottles and rags. But in one corner on a mattress he beheld the grinning face of his enemy—"Old Fags."

Meads shut the door silently and stood with his back to it.

"Oh," he said, "so here we are at last, old bird, eh!"

This move was apparently a supremely successful dramatic coup; for "Old Fags" lay still, paralysed with fear, no doubt.

"So this is our little 'ome, eh?" Meads continued, "where we bring little dogs and sell 'em. What have you got to say, you old——"

The groom's face blazed into a sudden accumulated fury. He thrust his chin forward and let forth a volley of frightful and blasting oaths. But "Old Fags" didn't answer, his shiny face seemed to be intensely amused with this outburst.

"We got to settle our little account, old bird, see?" and the suppressed fury of Meads' voice denoted some physical climax. "Why the Hell don't you answer?" he suddenly shrieked; and springing forward he lashed "Old Fags" across the cheek.

A terrible horror came over him. The cheek he had struck was as cold as marble and the head fell a little impotently to one side.

Trembling as though struck with an ague the groom picked up the guttering lamp and held it close to the face of "Old Fags." It was set in an impenetrable repose, the significance of which even the groom could not misunderstand. The features were calm and childlike, lit by a half-smile of splendid tolerance, that seemed to have over-ridden the temporary buffets of a queer world.

Meads had no idea how long he stood there gazing horror-struck at the face of his enemy. He only knew that he was presently conscious that Minnie Birdle was standing by his side; and as he looked at her, her gaze was fixed on "Old Fags," and a tear was trickling down either cheek.

"'E's dead," she said. "'Old Fags' is dead. 'E died this morning of noomonyer."

She said this quite simply, as though it was a statement that explained the wonder of her presence. She did not look at Meads, or seem aware of him.

He watched the flickering light from the lamp illuminating the underside of her chin and nostrils and her quivering brows.

"'E's dead," she said again, and the statement seemed to come as an edict of dismissal, as though love and hatred and revenge had no place in these fundamental things.

Meads looked from her to the tousled head, leaning slightly to one side on the mattress, and he felt himself in the presence of forces he could not comprehend. He put the lamp back quietly on the box and tiptoed from the room.

# THE HEAD OF HIS HOUSE

BY

CONRAD RICHTER

AUTHOR OF

THE LAUGHTER OF LEEN—*Outlook*

BROTHERS OF NO KIN—*Forum*

THE WALL OF THE HOUSE OF RYLAND—*Illustrated  
Sunday Magazine*

THE GIRL THAT 'GOT' COLLY—*Ladies' Home Journal*



## IV

### THE HEAD OF HIS HOUSE

**I** HAVE often wondered whether good old Tim, who did what he did, was sanctioned by God as head of the house of Mast.

Tim had always been my ideal head of a house. Kindly, humble, lovable, quaint, dependable as daylight he ruled over his little twenty-foot-front kingdom with a rule that I, a neighbour boy, or any one else, never felt was there until we committed some crime against it, broke one of his rose bushes or tormented the alley cat. And then Tim's calling us to account was so frank and gentle that it made every boy of us in the square love him like a father.

His wife was queen of his little kingdom. When she was on the front porch I never saw him come up the sidewalk without lifting his hat to her with an elaborate sweep and with a twinkle in his eye. As a rule he would pause gravely ten feet away and absurdly ask some respectful question in a solicitous voice perfectly audible to the neighbours for several doors. One time I remember it was, "Beg pardon, but do you think the lady of the house would give me boarding here?"

It seems I can still hear Mrs. Tim repeating to my

mother: "Oh, Mrs. Connor. It's the pleasantest husband in the world I have." Often to-day I still see her and Tim rocking disconsolately on their front porch in the throes of the grippe. As if it were yesterday I can hear the old lady's half-sobbed words: "Oh, Tim, nothing tastes good to me any more." And I can still see old Tim shake his head and hear him sadly say: "No usc, Lyddy. The sun doesn't shine any more."

They had never had children of their own. That, I think, was the greatest cross that Tim had to bear. But he carried it bravely. In his and Mrs. Tim's old age they took a nameless baby from their church orphanage and gave it the name of Mast and the first name of Shirk after Mrs. Mast's family. And now as the son grew up I saw the first evidence that some day there was going to be a question of whether Tim would always be the head of his house.

Tim was a well-read man, devouring newspapers, books and magazines, saving drawers full of clippings that he never had time to read again. But Shirk came from different blood. At the age of sixteen he clamoured to stop school. Through one of his companions, he secured a job as call boy for the railroad, and he offered six dollars a week to Tim just when Mrs. Tim after a long, hard illness had died. Tim had doctor bills and nurse bills and undertaking bills and very little money and nothing more than a rented house. But, although it was only another cross, he gave way to the boy and did not force him back to



school. "Tim, Tim," I muttered to myself. "You must watch yourself if you want to stay the head of your house."

For months I saw Tim's pathetic face. Then I brought pressure to bear in the office of the train-master where I worked. Before long Shirk was advanced to the office job of night crew caller. After the third year it paid him sixty dollars a month, and before I knew it he was married.

I think Marjy married him rather because she loved old Tim than because she loved Shirk. She was one of the sweet, unassuming girls of town. She and Tim had often been comrades on walks and talks. Shirk could never understand her or any other's interest in his father. He didn't seem to see an ounce of worth in the old man. And the older he grew, the less he seemed to appreciate Tim. It used to make me blue to think what an amazing father Tim would have made to some other boy. And the worst of it was that every day now Tim was getting nearer the time when, the chances were, Shirk would try to put him out of his own house.

It was as common a matter as insurance that brought the first clash. At our sitting-room window I had been picking apart the Sunday paper. Through the screen across our narrow alleyway I heard old Tim's voice in proud admonition.

"Now, son of mine! You've come to the time when you must do your figuring on double harness. Go slow for a while on cigarettes and movies and pool,

and buy your wife a wedding present. It isn't fair to Marjy if you don't take care of her, when you know that the railroad relief only pays funeral expenses."

"I don't see much in life insurance except for a big corporation to make money out of a man," observed Shirk. "You don't have any for us to get anything out of when you die."

"Shirk!" I heard Marjy's voice reproaching him.

"That's to my sorrow, son," came Tim's steady tones. "God knows I would buy it to-day, but though such things are cheap for the age of you, nobody sells it to an old man."

There was a little silence. Then Tim's voice came firmly.

"To-morrow, son, you will be going down town to take out two thousand dollars life insurance. I've read that it would cost you about twenty dollars a thousand. I'll pay one twenty dollars a year, and you will likely want to pay the other."

"I told you I didn't believe in insurance," declared the boy shortly. "Much less in throwing my good money away."

"If you think that, all right," answered old Tim. "Life's too short to try to change certain metals into gold. But to-morrow you're to go down town and get two thousand dollars life insurance. And as long as you put your feet under my table, my son, you're to remember that I am the head of this house."

"You may be now," Shirk answered sullenly. "But we'll see about that when I'm twenty-one."

"Twenty-one or thirty-one, son," old Tim replied, "if I am alive, I shall be your father, and the head of this house."

The months went on and it drew close to the time when Shirk would be twenty-one. Then one day I noticed that Marjy had become nervous and sallow. When I questioned my mother, she explained it with one five-lettered word. And the next day I heard that Marjy's young husband was gambling with his job. He had begun to sleep on his desk after midnight instead of staying awake and paying attention to business. Just the night before, Logan the night train-dispatcher had a hurry call for two crews—one for the yard, and one for Belt Line Junction. It was about three o'clock A.M. He rang long for his crew caller without getting an answer. So he crossed the yards and found Shirk "cocked up" on his desk asleep. The men said it was only Logan's good heart that had agreed to report it next time instead of at once.

I felt my friendship for Tim command me. Much as I disliked to do it, I leaned over the fence between our back yards one evening and told Tim the story.

"They tell me since, Tim," I added grimly, "that Shirk has started to 'cock up' again, only now he turns the other way so his head is nearer his telephone bell. It's a bit safer, perhaps, Tim. But it's 'cocking-up' just the same. If Logan ever catches him again, it will be all over. He'll be queered with the company anywhere. And you know what other chance a boy or man has in this town, especially if it

becomes known that the railroad company discharged him."

"I am grateful to you, Wally," said Tim quietly. "I won't mention your name. But after to-night the boy won't sleep on the job again." He drew himself up resolutely, and though he said nothing aloud, I knew he had said to himself, "I am the head of my house."

But Tim was getting old, and the inevitable happened. One night Logan failed again to get a reply from his crew caller's office. He crossed the yard, and found Shirk once more asleep on his desk. He had to shake the boy to get him awake. Next morning Logan reported the case to the superintendent, and Shirk was at once called and discharged.

I disliked to go home that evening, and once in the house I locked myself in. But it was of little use. About eight o'clock came a knock to the back door and there was Tim quietly asking to see me. I brought him in and tried to explain what had happened.

"You see, Tim, it isn't that the boy went to sleep. Everybody gets sleepy and everybody knows it's hard to keep awake and nobody knows it better than Logan himself. But the boy didn't fall asleep in his chair. He 'cocked up' on his desk again—cleaned off all the stuff, wrapped up an old coat for a pillow and laid himself down as though he didn't have another tap to do all night. It wasn't sleeping at the post, it was premeditated sleeping."

"I understand," said Tim gently. "It isn't that

that I came over for. I was wondering would they give the boy one more chance! You remember that Paul had to be struck by lightning before he could become Paul."

"I—don't know if they will, Tim," I stammered. "I might try them."

I did what I could for the boy. I saw Logan and then had a talk with my boss, Schaffer, the trainmaster. He took me in to see Manx, the superintendent. I told Manx chiefly about the boy's lovable old father and the critical sickness of the young wife.

"What sense does he have monkeying with his job when he has a good old dad like that and a sick wife in the house!" Manx demanded savagely.

There was nothing for me to say.

"Well." Manx stared at his desk. "We'll give him another chance. But his job's been filled. About the only thing now until something better turns up will be flagging down at Winter Street. Tell him to be on duty down there at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

I thanked him and left. That evening I reported my little success to Tim.

"Tell Shirk to take the job, and not to be discouraged," I told him. "Manx hinted there would be something better for him later. He may even have something in mind now, and may be offering this other job just to try Shirk out."

Tim thanked me with such gentle dignity that I felt fortunate to have been able to be of help to such a

man. But somehow I had my doubts about Tim being able to manage much longer the insubordinate member of his house. I was still awake that evening when Shirk came home, likely from movies or pool. He came in the side way. I heard the alleyway gate slam below my open window. In a little while I heard the murmur of Tim's news. Then the boy's voice answered distinctly.

"Mc go back to the company flagging like a cripple at twenty-five a month! Not on your life."

"This is only a job to try you, son. The superintendent told Mr. Connor it was," Tim explained.

"I don't care what that fool said. The company got smart and fired me. They can whistle till I come back—anyhow not to flag at a crossing at twenty-five a month."

"But they wouldn't want you back at all as far as they are caring," said Tim. "It was Mr. Connor who was the kind enough neighbour to ask the superintendent to try you again."

"What do you know!" raged the boy. "You never worked outside the shop in your life. I tell you it's Logan who wants to see me flagging down at Winter Street so he can come along and point me out as the fellow he had fired."

"You are blind, son," said Tim clearly. "What does Mr. Logan care about you more than to get out of you as much work as the company pays you for? You have never worked hard enough to make yourself valuable to anybody. The railroad company

can get a hundred others glad enough for every job they have to offer you."

"And I can get a hundred other jobs if I want them!" declared Shirk. "You'd be the one to make me flag at a crossing when I could be having a decent job at three times the money."

"You've always had a chance, son," rebuked Tim slowly. "In the morning I'll ask Mr. Connor to report you off sick for two days; that's how long you have to show that you can get another job, a decent one. If you don't get one by Friday night—Saturday morning you start working wherever the railroad company wants you, if it's keeping cows from off the track."

"Saturday morning you'll have nothing more to do with me," returned the boy defiantly. "I'll be of age, and I'll work where I want to, and when I want to."

"A boy may be thirty-one and still need a head of his house, son," answered Tim quietly.

"If you're the head of the house, why don't you own it! Why don't you make enough money to feed the people in your house!"

Old Tim was silent. I could imagine his wounded eyes.

"Why don't you support your house so I don't have to work, if you're the head of it!" jeered the boy. "You, making only a dollar eighty-five a day, trying to boss me—you make me sick."

"You have two days to find a better job in," said

Tim gravely. "Then you and I will see who is the head of the house."

Before I was up next morning Tim had asked my mother whether I would please report Shirk off sick for two days—that he, Tim, would explain later. I did as he requested, and spent the remainder of the day wondering what means Tim was going to take if Shirk found no job and still refused to flag. I wondered if Tim would try force. I hoped he wouldn't. Shirk was too big. And he was young, while Tim was starting to wobble. I resolved to stay close by and give the old man help if he needed me.

The evening of Shirk's second day I sat in our sitting-room and tried to read. Though the evening was unusually cool I had the window raised. Through the screen I could see Tim alone with a light in his dining-room, patiently smoking his pipe. Marjy was likely upstairs in bed. Old Tim had told mother early the morning before that her doctor had said that the girl's only chance now was the fresh air, mental diversion and physical recreation of some sanatorium in the mountains. Tim had mentioned that he was going to try to borrow some money for the trip as soon as Shirk started to work again.

I was wondering how much money the old man would have to scrape together and where he would get it, when I heard some one coming in through the alleyway. The footsteps echoed dully. By the walk I knew it was Shirk, but it wasn't the walk of a man who had just landed a job.



Through my screen I heard the door close behind him. Then I saw father and son confronting each other from across their dining-room table. After a moment Tim turned and pulled down the blind. I was out of it. I couldn't hope to hear through Tim's closed windows. And now the possible danger of the old man began to worry me.

I made up my mind to go boldly over and call. But before I was even up from my chair a shot rang through the loose Mast windows and echoed cavernously in the alleyway.

Other neighbours heard it, too, but I was the nearest. I do not know to-day whether I scaled the fence or scuttled around by the alleyway. But I remember bursting in old Tim's back door, and I shall never forget that scene in Tim's dining-room.

The house was anything but wide, and this room like ours, chopped off for the alleyway extension, was about ten feet narrow. A few moments before, it might have been cheerful. A golden oak sideboard stood against the wall with its glasses and dishes as neatly arranged as when Mrs. Tim was alive. Drawn up cosily to the table were two of the half dozen golden oak chairs. The table was covered with a cheerful red cloth. Beside the white of the few dishes and the yellow of Tim's old pipe, the cloth looked bright red. But it seemed hopelessly faded where its corners dragged the floor beside the rich wine colour that stained the face and hair of Shirk. He lay on the carpet quiet except for an almost imperceptible

ooze from the ugly dark hole where his hair and temple met.

I don't remember what I first stammered to the old man. I only recall a fervent prayer to myself that I might see Shirk get to his feet and sneer familiarly into my face. But, except for the trickle of blood down his temple, there was nothing about the boy that moved. I tried to imagine what had happened. Somehow I had no idea that old Tim had done it until he straightened up from the floor and laid an old blue revolver on the red cloth. I could not help shrinking from him, but I pitied from the bottom of me his dazed grey eyes and shaking fingers.

"He said I wasn't the head of the house," old Tim faltered. "I had to show him I was." He drew a breath almost quietly. "I had to show him."

"But, Tim, you didn't do it—not with that!"

He nodded faintly.

"Even in self-defence, Tim! A thing like that! Was he killing you?"

"No," said Tim slowly, shaking his head. "I didn't have to do it in self-defence."

"Then for God's sake don't tell anybody," I flung at him. "Don't say a word until I get you a lawyer. Don't open your mouth."

A moment more and the kitchen and sitting-room doorways were crowded with frightened neighbours' faces. Later came the police and to the first question asked him Tim replied: "He said I wasn't the head of the house—and I had to show him."

"Tim!" I whispered in his ear, shaking his shoulder, "for God's sake keep your mouth shut."

The police took him away and after tearing myself from knotted neighbours, I went down to the railroad and told Logan the story. Logan was tremendously affected and seemed to take some of the blame on himself. He gave me a card to an attorney friend of his named Munson and told me to engage him—that he would pay the bill. The next morning I reported off and was waiting in the lawyer's office before he came in. I found him a ready listener. But when I had finished telling him the case and everything I knew, he shook his head.

"I'm sorry, but your old man's got no case at all unless we change his story. A man has no legal right, you know, to kill his son in order to make him accept this or that or any other job."

"But there's something wrong somewhere," I stammered. "Tim is one of the finest, gentlest souls in the world. He would never hurt a fly without cause."

"What do you mean by cause? There isn't much cause in law except self-defence."

"I believe it *was* self-defence," I muttered.

"Your defendant doesn't seem to support you," said Munson thoughtfully. "I think we had better go down and get his version."

We readily gained admittance to Tim's cell, and I encouraged Tim to trust his new friend with everything.

"As I'm to be your counsel," explained Munson earnestly, "I must know everything just as it happened. It doesn't say that I will tell everything I know. But I cannot and dare not make a defence for you until I am assured that the prosecution will have no vital facts that I don't know."

"The only way, Tim," I urged again, "is to tell everything."

Tim nodded and then repeated merely what he had related to me the night before.

"You cannot convince me that you used a revolver on your son without more cause than that," insisted Munson clearly. "It's ridiculous. Tell me every step, please, just as it happened."

"He was only home a few moments," insisted Tim. "There is nothing more to tell."

"But I want to know every word that was said, every move you both made. Don't you realise, man, that you may hang for this if you do not tell me what I have every right and reason to know in order to try to save you."

Old Tim bent forward helplessly.

"There was nothing else. If I must hang for it, they must hang me. I am sorry, Wally, for the neighbourhood—and for Marjy. How is Marjy?"

"Mother has her over at our place," I told him. "She is not much better."

"Wally!" Tim leaned toward me anxiously. "Before long there may be some money come to her from the poor lad. Will you take it, please, and send her

up in the mountains to the best place the doctor can find."

"I'll see that she gets there right away, Tim," I promised him.

Before we left, Munson tried again to force some reasonable explanation from the old man's lips. But Tim could add nothing to his story. We gave up at last and went to Munson's office, where he summed up Tim's best defence. Briefly, it was that the boy Shirk had resisted Tim, his father, as I had heard him do before, and that old Tim because of his advancing years had used the revolver to threaten—and it had gone off against his will, partially turning his mind.

In due time the case came to trial. But it was a losing fight with Tim unmanageable as he had been from the first. To his own disaster and to the frenzy of Munson he repeated twice to the jury, "My son said I was not the head of the house—and I had to show him I was. I had to show him!" The only satisfaction we had was in the fact that the prosecution was able to force no more from Tim than had Munson or I.

They sentenced old Tim for life and as soon afterward as I could I went to see him. He tried to smile to me as I came in, but it was only a wistful, forlorn twist that threatened every moment to turn to tears. I did my best to cheer him and was glad that I had news.

"Mother got a letter from Marjy to-day," I told him. "Marjy says she and the baby are getting bet-

ter every day and will be down to see you soon. She says it was the mountains and nothing else that helped her."

"Thank God," muttered Tim, closing his eyes. His lips moved silently. To me they seemed to form words that could only make strange meaning.

"Tim," I demanded, an incredible assumption working in my brain, "what have you known all this time that you haven't told us!"

Tim opened his eyes and wiped them tremblingly with the freckled back of his hand.

"Nothing, Wally," he muttered.

I was sure now that I had struck a trail. I caught hold of his shoulder.

"Tell me, Tim," I urged. "Trust me! I'll say nothing to anybody. Sit down. You're weak, man! You're sick!"

But he stubbornly kept standing.

"You promise—never to breathe a word—till I'm gone?" he questioned closely.

"I promise, Tim." I held up my right hand. For a moment he seemed to falter.

"Oh, Wally," he sobbed, breaking down and blinking the tears from his old grey eyes. "Did you never guess when you stood by me so hard? The poor, headstrong laddy. He couldn't help it. He came from other stock than we."

"Couldn't help what, Tim!" I floundered.

"For two days he tried for his job, but everybody refused him," pleaded Tim. "He came home that

night so blue. The poor soul, Wally. If he hadn't been blue, he wouldn't have done it—before I could get to him. My revolver was in the sideboard drawer, under the red napkins. He knew it, and till I got to him it was too late."

"Tim!" I demanded of him, amazed. "Why have you been lying to us, to everybody, as you have?"

Tim's eyes entreated me.

"The document!" he reminded. "It's written there that if the policy-holder takes his life, no money will be paid until it's a year after the insurance was taken out. And for the boy it was only seven months. What would Marjy have done? I hadn't even a dollar to give her to go away. And she had to go."

"But, Tim, Tim!" I faltered bewilderingly. "Why didn't you say then that Shirk *attacked you*—that you had to do it in self-defence. You might have saved the insurance and yourself besides."

Old Tim squared his unsteady shoulders and stood gently erect.

"I take care of my children, Wally," he said, "the dead as well as the living. I am the head of my house."





# THE ABIGAIL SHERIFF MEMORIAL

BY

VINCENT O'SULLIVAN

AUTHOR OF

THE BURNED HOUSE—*Century Magazine*

OLIVIA MIST—*Century Magazine*

THE GOOD GIRL—*A Novel*

A DISSERTATION UPON SECOND FIDDLES—*A Novel*

The manuscript of this story came to us pen-written. We wonder if its many rejections were due to this or to its unusual quality? It is far removed from the "Formula Story" that so frequently takes up space in the magazines of today, but we were unable to discover any line of this masterly pictured bit of life that could give offence to the most delicate reader.

F. S. G.

## V

### THE ABIGAIL SHERIFF MEMORIAL

**L**YDDY, the mulatto girl at Mrs. Wassman's room-house, opened my door noisily.

"Say, are you awake?"

"No."

"Well, here's some mail for you."

"All right, put it there," I mumbled with my head under the bedclothes. "What time is it?"

"'Bout half-past three. The sun's been shinin' jest lovely all day. Listen, why don't you go out in the sun once and a while? 'Pears to me that's what you kind of need 'stead of layin' there in bed an' stayin' out all night. Mrs. Wassman's gettin' real mad. Yes, sir."

"Tell her I was in as early as four o'clock this morning. That will console her."

The mulatto gave a good-humoured laugh. I heard her singing and banging with a brush outside on the stairs. I was furious at being waked up when I might have had two or three hours more of unconsciousness. With my eyes closed, I tried to think of nothing. But it was no use. The awakening, the most hideous hour of the twenty-four, had to be faced.

I pulled over the chair on which my clothes had been

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thrown and went through the pockets. Four cents, a subway ticket, a half-empty packet of cigarettes, and a small "taken-while-you-wait" photograph of a girl. Where had I got that? Oh, yes; it was that girl who said she was a model. Her shoulders had been painted by—who did she say had painted her shoulders? She had been on the covers of two magazines. I tore up the photograph and threw the pieces on the floor, and then looked for the letter which the mulatto had brought in. Whom could it be from? I hardly ever got letters nowadays.

I glanced at the envelope, but when I saw the business address of Abner, the picture-dealer, in the corner I flung it away in disgust and lay down again and pulled the bedclothes over my head. It was, of course, another request from Abner to give him some work that would cover the advance he had made six months ago.

"What a rotten life!" I thought.

Soon it would be a year since I had touched a brush or a drawing-pencil. I had had the beginnings of a sort of renown among certain groups; a few articles even had been written about me in little hole-and-corner magazines; but now there was nothing I was more sick of than art and the chatter of art. Art? I hardly gave a thought to it. I would gladly have put my boot through any picture ever painted if the act would have brought me enough for one really big trial of fortune. I had the conviction that the reason my luck had been so invariably bad of late was that the

stakes I was obliged to play were too paltry and also too vital. When you are staking your food and shelter, you are so nervous that your judgment is no longer trustworthy. That is how it had been with me for seven or eight months.

One glorious night I won twenty times as much as I ever got for a picture. But of late the sums I had to put up were so small that I used sometimes go in terror lest they would refuse me at the door. One night they did refuse me; they said I was a broken-down bum. I walked along a street of private houses wondering what I could do. I was suffering the torments of the damned. I would have taken my vest and shirt off and pawned them, but it was too late to pawn. I would have gone to Abner, gone down on my knees to him, entered into any contract he liked, but it was too late for him, too. What was I to do? It was a hard, cold night, but although I was thinly clad, and had not eaten anything to speak of for the last two days, I scarcely felt the cold. I must have had fever, for I was shaking and burning all over. I felt sure that if I could get back there, just once for only five minutes, the luck would come flowing my way. I could not go back to where I lived. I thought with horror of the bare room and the flaring gas-jet. "I'll go in the river," I thought, "sooner than go back to my bedroom tonight."

Just ahead of me, a motor car stopped. A footman jumped off and opened the door, and a lady stepped out. It was no decision of mine; I had no

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time for decision; I was driven by instinct to go up to her.

"You couldn't help a poor fellow this cold night?"

"Here, you get out!" shouted the footman. "Beat it, you dirty beggar!"

But the lady turned, and seeing a shabby-looking man without an overcoat, being hustled by her fur-clad servant, she may have thought that things were not altogether as they ought to be. Anyhow, she paused as she was entering the house.

"I'm so sorry for you," she said to me. "Please take this;" and she handed me a bill.

It was as well she did. If she had refused, I might have plucked her rich cloak off her back and made a run for it. I tell you, I was desperate.

"Madam's too good to the like of you," said the footman. "If you don't clear off I'll call a policeman."

I turned into the avenue, and by the advantage of a street lamp I looked at the note in my hand. It was probably a dollar, but it might be two. It was ten! Whether it had been given by good-will or in mistake; there it was. And it brought luck that night; I did well.

With the proceeds I furbished myself up somewhat. Heaven knows I hesitated about doing this; but it was necessary. If I presented a fairly decent appearance where I went to play, they would not be so ready to insult me and throw me out. That was the only reason I bought clothes, for I had gradually cut adrift from

all acquaintances; and as for the art-world that lives in expensive studios, and gives receptions, and wears dress-clothes, and looks after its health, I had nothing to do with it. It was always a question with me when I had a dollar whether it would be safe to go without food or not. Once I had a kind of fit in that place where we played, and they made things very unpleasant for me. They were afraid I might die in the house, and then the police would come in. So to prevent a recurrence of the fainting-fit I began to eat more regularly.

Sometimes I would take what might be called a good dinner, two or three dishes. Then I would give myself some advice and go immediately back to my room, resolved to stay in all night. But if you have only one room, the worst hours to be in it, I think, are the early hours of the night. For if you have only a cheap room to depend on for shelter, and hold that precariously, you have surely had horrible thoughts in it at one time or another; and they are all over the wall. If you find yourself in your room at nine or ten o'clock in the evening, a time when you might have a respite, these haggard thoughts come down from the wall and crowd round you, and the anguish is such that only the most heroic spirits can bear it. I never could. The voices in the streets, the lights and noise, called me out of that place of torment. In the streets you have the illusion of sharing the torment with others.

It all seems strange to me when I look back on that time now—now that life has become so grey and in-

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different. I ask myself, could that really have been me? I hardly existed till five or six at night. It all depended on the awakening. If I regained consciousness upon the pleasant thought that I had recovered a good sum from the night before, I might go out, even if the sun were shining; stroll in the park; buy myself a decent meal. In the opposite case, I would lie there supinely, prolonging a comatose state as much as I could, so as not to face the blank merciless day with all the shifts and expedients and scrawpings and humiliations. As for work—drawing and painting—are you laughing at me? I tried it once or twice, to do what is called commercial work—pictures for advertisements. Even with that kind of thing I could make no headway. I stared at the paper for an hour at a time, but I was developing a new system of play, a flawless system which was bound to succeed.

Well! This day that the letter had come from Abner, I found that I had four cents and a subway ticket. Curse it all! It was late in October, but my vest would have to go to the pawnshop. Also the silver cigarette case which I kept for desperate emergencies. I could no longer recall the number of times it had been pawned and redeemed. It had been a good friend to me, that cigarette case, since that woman gave it me with her name, "Maggie," reproduced in facsimile of her writing across the cover. I suppose she thought I should always carry it next to my heart. She did not foresee the coarse jokes of pawnbrokers' assistants about "Maggie," at which I



used to smile in the hope of putting them in the humour to advance a little more.

I heard the cuckoo-clock in Mrs. Wassman's parlour pipe out five, and decided to get up. But I lay till about half-past five. Then I dressed, wrapped my vest in a piece of newspaper, and slipped the cigarette case into my pocket. My hat was really too bad; somebody had sat on it last night. As I was studying it absent-mindedly, my eyes fell on Abner's letter on the floor near the torn photograph of the girl. Perhaps I had better see what he had to say! Then I thought it would be only giving myself useless pain to read the letter, and I went out leaving it on the floor.

I had to go uptown, and then across, to reach the pawnshop I customed. Near Madison Avenue, going toward Fifth, whom should I run upon but Abner himself! I kept my eyes down and was for shuffling by, but he hailed me.

"Hullo! Is that the way you treat your friends? Didn't you get my letter?"

His tone was cordial; he seemed to be safe and to mean well. I could see no sign in his eyes of the dollars he had lent me.

"You look more than usually prosperous, Abner. The picture business must be booming."

"Yes, I've struck a good line lately—modern Belgians—Endsor, Van Mieghem, Rik Wonters. Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"About what?"

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"Why, about what I said in my letter."

"The fact is, Abner, I forgot to read your letter."

"Well, there it is! I said when I was dictating it that very likely you wouldn't read it. You'll come in for a million some day and never know it. Look here!" he said good-humouredly; and he took my arm. "Just stroll up Fifth Avenue with me, and I'll tell you about the business."

As we walked along he explained that a lawyer had come to see him last week on behalf of a friend who lived in a remote town in New England. The friend had presented a library to his native place, and desired to hang a portrait of himself, and also one of his wife, in the reading-room.

"I thought of you," said Abner. "Like a flash, you came into my head. I said to myself: 'I'll send him up there.' You're just the man, and it will do you good."

"Why this unaccustomed philanthropy?" I inquired. "I don't want to leave New York. Besides, I am not the kind of man they are looking for. If there is money in it, and no doubt there is, seeing you have taken on the deal, why don't you get one of those men with the well-advertised names and expensive studios?"

"Just because they have the expensive studios," Abner drawled. "There is money in this commission, as you justly remark, but not enough money for gilt-edged ornaments of art. Do you know that you can't walk into the expensive studios nowadays and say you

want a thing done at once? Damned if they don't pull out their engagement-books like dentists. No, no, you're the man I want. You've got talent enough, and of course you are much cheaper."

We were now come to the square at the entrance to Central Park. He pointed to one of the hotels which stand there.

"Come in here with me and have a drink. We'll make arrangements, and I'll give you some money at once. You don't want to leave New York? Why, it's the very thing for you. I speak as a friend. You look suffering and exhausted. I suppose you *can* paint still, can't you? How long is it since you tried?"

"Of course, as I have no money, I am not a free-agent. I'm a slave," I said, "like most other paupers. Still, I don't like to have my life mapped out for me by somebody else. What is more, I won't. Let us hear what are your terms. If they are not tempting, you will have to find somebody else to paint your citizens, Abner."

He swallowed the cocktail he had ordered. Then he mentioned the fee, which was much higher than I had expected.

"I'll give you a hundred dollars right now," he said, and he pulled out his cheque-book.

The project, after all, began to take a fairer light. I thought of my mean room with horror, and of Mrs. Wassman with her shrill or tearful demands for rent. Unless I won tonight upon the product of the cigarette case and my vest, I should be driven to sell the pawn-

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ticket, and after that I should be utterly on my beam-ends. In any case, this portrait painting would not be for long. And the change to walking out of this restaurant with a hundred dollars, instead of just my vest wrapped in newspaper to depend on, was too sweet to be resisted.

"Very well," I said. "Hand over the hundred."

"You'll go tomorrow, certainly?" he asked as he tore the cheque out of his book. "No mistake?"

"Haven't you any ready money?"

He gave me four dollars.

"Just write me a line when you get up there. I'm sending them a telegram tonight, and they will expect you tomorrow."

He added a few directions which I wrote down. Then we had another drink and parted.

I felt rather dazed. I had eaten very little for some days, and the spirits I had taken went to my head. I found myself about eight o'clock in the crowd on Broadway, still carrying my vest. A man and a woman got out of a motor car in front of a restaurant and I heard my name called. It was Jennie Graham, the girl who had given me her photograph the night before.

"Gee! you look ghastly," she said. "Listen, come and be introduced to my friend." She pointed to a man in dress-clothes who was standing a few paces away. "Then you can dine with us. He's sure to ask you. I'll make him."

"I have a word for you," I said abruptly. "That

photograph you gave me last night—it came to grief. I haven't got it any more."

But she continued to look at me kindly. "Gee! I'm sorry for you. And there's no help for it."

"No help for what?"

"You're so unhappy!" she cried. "So unhappy! I don't believe there is another man as unhappy as you. You don't know yourself how unhappy you are."

I felt in my coat pockets for Abner's cheque. "Do me a favour," I said. "Keep this for me tonight, and send it down to me tomorrow morning about ten."

I gave her my address. From the door of the restaurant she turned and glanced back at me. She seemed to be still saying, in her voice made husky by too many cigarettes: "So unhappy! So unhappy!"

She sent the cheque before nine in the morning. I had come in very late and had thrown myself dressed on the bed. I went out at once to cash the cheque and came back and paid Mrs. Wassman.

That done, I sat in my room with the rest of the money in my hands. I had that peculiar feeling of contentment which comes over a man who is constantly threatened with having the bed plucked from under him, when he has secured himself a shelter for some time ahead. Mrs. Wassman would leave me in peace now for several weeks. Why go away? The sum of money I held was by no means large; but it was enough with which to try certain combinations bound to win.

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I could see them working out before my eyes. On the other hand, if I should lose, I should lose, too, all the fee that was to come from Abner. He would get somebody else. . . .

What a struggle! Three times I went downstairs and out into the street, and came back. The last time I decided I would not make the journey. Two minutes later, I seized my hat and ran downstairs, and made for a street car. In the car I arranged that I would give myself only a minute to catch the train. If there should be people blocking the way at the ticket-window, I would be too late, and there was not another train all day. Accordingly, I hung about the streets neighbouring the station, and then lounged in at the last minute. The ticket-window was clear! I boarded the train just as it was moving out.

In the train, I sat feeling as if I were drowned. There was a thin whining in my ears; I could think of nothing. The struggle had spent me. The first clear thought I had, came in about an hour, and it was that I had not told Mrs. Wassman I was leaving. Such few things as I owned were still in that square, dismal room. Abner's letter and the torn photograph were still lying on the floor.

At a town where I had to wait over an hour to connect with another train, I thought I had better buy a few necessary things. I should have to walk in on those people with a paper parcel for baggage, but it could not be helped. Besides, I did not care.

They lived in a good-sized house standing well back from a little street bordered with trees. Something unfriendly and depressing emanated from the house as soon as you crossed the threshold. If I were a practised writer, I suppose I could bring the sensation home to you; but as it is, it baffles me to realise it on paper. It was not so much a sensation of mystery as of secrecy. Those who had died in that house, in the seventy years or more it had been standing, had not quite gone away; something of them remained in the still rooms. At mealtimes there always seemed to be some other presence, or presences, at the table besides the master and mistress of the house.

The word for them is subdued. They were subdued to the atmosphere of their house, to their traditions, to the naïve furniture they sat among. This unprotesting acquiescence in the unlovely was, of course, to be expected, given the locality. The tradition was the same as that of the British small tradesman, nonconformist in religion and politics—the stock they originated from. Dreary and unpicturesque religion had no doubt in the first place inspired the dreary and unpicturesque surroundings. In a community which had never opened its eyes to any of the arts except literature, and to that only on its unartistic side, the absence of any testimony to æsthetic needs was not surprising. What did surprise, as one glanced about and the lack of any personal touch became more and more distressing, was that they had conceded so far to an unfamiliar spirit as to have their portraits

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painted. Certainly they were the very first of their family to make this concession.

That first night neither of them affected me beyond a consciousness that they were there and that I was their guest. It is true that I felt sick, and desperate, and sorry to my heart I had come there; and I was unable to study them accurately. But in the days that followed, when I had become more resigned and clear-headed, they remained so antipathetic and irritating that I used to invent all sorts of excuses to be as little with them as I could manage.

David Sheriff was null. He struck me as one of the innumerable men who live out their lives without ever realising themselves. He was president of the local bank, as his father had been before him, and had, by the report of the town, much money; though beyond whatever pleasure came from the consciousness that he was rich, he got no pleasure or profit of any kind, that I could see, out of his wealth. In our intercourse he always remembered he was paying me; he was very far indeed from that stage of civilisation which breeds the patron of artists, who feels himself less the obliger than the obliged. He was perhaps fifty-five, with a lot of loose black hair parted in the middle over a square forehead, protruding at the top, and a plump face—one of the most usual types of American. He had suffered a stroke of palsy two or three years ago, and now and then his hands trembled violently, and his head nodded a little. It was easy to see that the gift of this library to his native town he regarded as the



central event of his career; it was never long out of his conversation. He had not yet got over his astonishment at his own generosity. It seemed even that he was not quite at his ease about this, for he kept talking to justify himself, to prove to himself he was right—that he had not thrown away money on a toy.

“Was it your own notion?” I asked one day when I was painting him. From the moment I had set eyes on him, I had decided upon the kind of thing I was going to turn out—something after the manner of the John S. Sargent official portrait. It was weary work; I had no heart for it, and I was often on the point of kicking my easel across the room. I took a long pull at the coffee I had standing by me. “Did you think of it all out of your own head?” I asked him insolently enough.

“Well, n—no,” he hesitated. “It was more my wife’s idea.”

“But your wife’s name is Miriam, isn’t it? Why do you call the library the Abigail Sheriff Memorial? Was Abigail Sheriff your daughter?”

I was feeling all the time that I should like to throttle some of his money out of him, and besides, the plan of his ridiculous library filled me with contempt. But, although I put my crude questions roughly, he showed no resentment. On the contrary, he smiled for some reason or other in a deprecating way and looked a little confused.

“The fact is, Abigail Sheriff was my wife’s sister. She was my first wife. She died—painful mem-

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ories——” He ended in a mutter. “It was my wife’s idea,” he said again.

I did not feel any active rancour toward this fool; it was mere exasperation. I hardly remembered him when I was not in his presence. But his wife, Miriam Sheriff, I disliked intensely, with that kind of dislike which makes one hate the thought of some persons. She was tall and thin and dark and looked considerably younger than her husband. Her thin lips, pressed close together, indicated a life spent in self-repression, and a long habit of silence. When you saw her, what struck you first was an impression of gauntness, the gauntness noticeable in sufferers from consumption, especially if they are tall; and next, in a secondary way, an impression of flame, and, so to speak, of frigid rage, as if she moved among the contingencies of life warily; and resented that she had so to move. Withal she was handsome, with a kind of handsomeness which repelled rather than attracted, and indeed made no effort to attract. She had extraordinary brown eyes, under long lashes which I could not help looking at, which nobody, such was their magnetism, could help looking at, although they were weary and veiled and somehow quenched, whether from looking out on tedious days or too much weeping. A mole on the cheek near the lips added to the peculiar fascination of the face, by relieving the bitter expression of the mouth. You thought as you looked at her: “Here is a woman who has suffered much, whose spirit has been outraged and perhaps mortally wounded.” You thought that, I

say, but you felt no compassion. I even went so far as to fancy that the fine, tragic face was an accident of nature, covering nothing more than a soul as shallow and peevish as any of her neighbours. She was often in fits of black silence which nobody dared to interrupt,—brooding, despondent, and, as I thought, almost torpid. When she did talk it was invariably of the town and the people round about. Some of her characterisations were searing and drew protests from her husband. I learned that the inhabitants of the town disliked her, and were dreadfully afraid of her. Me, she seemed to make a point of ignoring as much as she could; she would talk past me to her husband when we were all three together. Even when I looked at her she always looked quickly away. From some things she said, I gathered that she disapproved of the pursuit of art.

"All those boys and girls in New York and Boston, who are studying painting, want an excuse not to do any real work," she said once in her bitter way. "I know nothing about art," she said another time.

"You are like me," I said, "in that."

"You? You live by it, don't you?"

"No, I can't live by it. Bless you, I ain't got enough punch."

"You are not serious," she murmured; and she fell into one of her abstracted fits, twining and untwining her slim fingers in her lap while she stared with her dark frown at a point on the floor.

I had begun to paint her now, and accordingly she

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was obliged to speak to me more than she had done hitherto. My intention had been to brush out a portrait of her in exactly the same style as the one I had done of her husband. But I had been more and more struck by that fugitive look in her eyes, that unwillingness to meet my gaze, as if behind the eyes were a hunted soul seeking madly for refuge. This look, so much in contrast to the hard composure of the face, always interested me, especially as soon as I noticed that I was the only person who called it forth. At her husband, and at everybody else, she looked steadily, with impatient tolerance, and it was their eyes which shifted before hers.

It weighed with me so much that after the first sittings I threw aside my canvas and began again in an altogether different style. I thought to paint something phantom-like, swooning and imprecise, after the manner of Eugène Carrière. Thus, it seemed to me, I had the best chance of catching the soul; and it was the soul, lurking behind those eyes, I wanted to draw forth.

Now, after I had been working at this for some days, I was puzzled and disturbed by an inexplicable alteration in the picture. I was satisfied with my work, which I scarcely ever am; and during the sittings, while Mrs. Sheriff was in front of me, it seemed to me that I was doing just what I had set out to do—drawing forth her soul. But one morning, when the picture was beginning to take its final shape, I could not believe the report of my eyes when I examined it.

This was not a portrait of Mrs. Sheriff I was doing; it was a portrait of somebody else; somebody I had never seen before. It was as if you were to see, after you had written a letter, a letter in your handwriting, but upon a subject altogether different from what you thought you had written about, upon a subject, in fact, of which you had no cognisance. I was extremely frightened; I feared I was going out of my mind. I looked still more attentively at the canvas, and I fancied I saw a vague look of Jennie Graham, the girl back there in New York. Yes, there was a vague suggestion of what I can only call the "forgiveness" of her face in the face I had painted. "That's it!" I thought furiously. "The delusions are beginning. They were bound to begin. Why did I ever come to this damned hole?"

I had not a sitting with Mrs. Sheriff that morning because she had to go to a funeral. I was very glad of it. I resolved to give up the work and start for New York. The husband's portrait was finished: Abner would have to find somebody else to do the wife, somebody who had not suffered from strain and hardship and disappointment, whose vision was unimpaired.

I went out of doors about one. It was a clear autumn day with a soft and humid air stirring. There was a wood, spreading over many miles beyond the town, where I was used to walk, or just to lie on my back among the leaves. There the year was dying like a love-lorn queen, yielding herself passionately to

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death. And I took comfort in those woods, and the dreamy, dappled light, that was shed there. My mood changed. . . .

In truth, that land there is like a woman. It embraces you with all its colour and softness, and entrances and lulls like a love-philtre. Lying caressed under its gold and crimson, plunged in its ever-changing, ever-offering beauty, time is no more. You want nothing of the naïve and unwise turmoil of the market-place; content to let the days slip through your fingers like the variously coloured beads of a rosary. That is all. To lie close to nature, very close, seeing nothing but the spacious day and the soft low brows of the night, was all I wanted now. I was bewitched by the land. It looked at me, with all its entrancement, so reproachfully: "How can you go away?" That life back there of a month ago—Mrs. Wassman, the mulatto, the dingy bedroom, the foul air and the grinding anxiety—what a hideous dream!

But also, what a state I had fallen into to paint my portrait like that! It was not that I had lost my skill, because, as I recalled the picture out here in the woods, it seemed to me that I had never done anything so good. But it was a portrait of somebody I had never seen. And yet the husband's portrait had come out all right; it was an honest, workmanlike portrait, entirely unoriginal, a shameless *pastiche* of Sargent, which any public body would be glad to accept with speechifying. But when I thought of the other, I shuddered with horror. And I began to blame the

model, that horrible Mrs. Sheriff. My feeling for her now was hatred.

I spent the afternoon in the woods. Toward evening I came upon an opening which gave upon a bay, an arm of the sea.

I had been trying to recall, as I walked, anything special about Mrs. Sheriff. Up to this I had taken no interest in her, but now I had the vivid interest we feel in anything we hate or dread. I remembered that on the second night I was there, I had asked David Sheriff how old his house was, and upon hearing his reply, I had said, as a flourish, that in every house which has been standing long a corpse lies under the hearthstone. He had received this with the usual chuckle which he uttered when anything amused him. But his wife had seemed extremely angry, and spoke hardly another word during the evening. This was plainly the whim of a stupid, provincial woman, who looked on any kind of plain speaking as bad manners.

What else was there? I could not remember anything. Oh, yes! There was that night it was blowing so hard, and in an excess of boredom I had said inanely that I wondered the entrance door was not blown open. The wind was really pounding on the windows. But Mrs. Sheriff had evidently taken my remark as an insult to her house, and rose abruptly from the table (we were at dinner) and did not appear again. Her husband apologised for her, a little awkwardly I thought. The next day, when I saw Mrs. Sheriff I excused myself, and explained that I had not

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meant to imply that her house was not sound; but she brushed my excuses aside as of no consequence in her frigid way. "What a disagreeable woman!" I said to myself for the hundredth time.

I was thinking that now, as I stood facing the bay. Looking seaward, about two miles away to the west, were the capes; between them the breakers, always tumbling just there, were gleaming; and behind them the sun was going down. The sky was a blaze of harmonies; wilder lights, such ineffable beauty, I had not seen than on that ending day. It seemed as if the light were pouring through a gorge which led on and on to the end of the world, into eternity. It was the gate of heaven. It was sheer nature, untarnished by any touch of man. Thus, and no otherwise, must the scene have lain before the eyes of the lonely Indian, when, on this day and at this hour, six hundred years ago, he stood on this spot and stared at the sunset. Nothing—absolutely nothing was there to indicate the presence of man.

That is, looking far out to sea, as I was doing. But as my gaze shortened, there appeared on an elevation of the ground, a space clear of trees a hundred yards or more in front of me, a woman's figure, standing solitary and black in the intensely clear light of the sunset-tide. I knew her at once, both by her unusual tallness and also by something special in her bearing. It was Mrs. Sheriff. She was, as I say, clad all in black: she must have come straight here from the funeral. She had her back to me, looking toward the



sunset; and even as I saw her she stretched out her arms and then drew them in to her breast—a gesture of yearning and embrace. Then I saw her drop on her knees, and she bowed down till her head touched the ground. She must have remained nearly a minute in that position: I know it was long enough for me to fear she had died. At last she rose and walked a little unsteadily nearer to where I lingered till she came to a tall tree which stood solitary, with its russet leaves touched to something more exquisite by the sunset. She stood gazing for a time at this tree, and then suddenly she flung her arms about the trunk and pressed her lips to the rugged bark.

“She is a madwoman,” I thought.

I determined to slip away, if possible, without letting her see me. But, to strike a path, I had to move toward where she stood; and the leaves and dead twigs rustled and crackled under my feet. She turned and saw me.

She started violently, and stood resting one hand on the tree and the other held over her heart. She was evidently astonished to see anybody in this lone place. But in a moment she had recovered herself. She had recognised me; and she came forward without hesitation or reluctance, as it seemed, though she still wavered in her walk.

I have already described her, and you picture her as repellent. Certainly that is how she had impressed me. But as she came toward me now in the sunset, I thought I had never seen anybody so beautiful. It

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was an unearthly beauty; a radiance encircled her; her face was transfigured. About her lips and in her eyes was a smile tender and welcoming, such as I had never seen before; it was clear that she did not at all resent my presence. I felt that she was even glad I was there.

“You saw me at my devotions?”

Now that she was close by, I perceived that her eyes were dilated and that she was panting a little from some strange emotion which was too strong for her sorely labouring heart. I muttered ungraciously that I had only just caught a glimpse of her as I was searching for the path.

“We own these woods,” she said. “Nobody ever comes here except in the middle of summer, and very few at any time.”

Then, as if unable longer to bear these trivialities of convention, she impulsively seized my hand.

“Oh, I am so glad you have come! I have always wished to see you in this place, because I am natural here, I am myself. I know you will understand me. I felt the very first night you came that you understood me; and I could never look at you afterward because I knew you were reading my soul.”

She paused, coughed a little, and touched her lips with a handkerchief. I thought I saw a blood-stain on it, but it may have been the uncertain light. “I knew you would sympathise with me,” she said.

“Yes. But how did you know?”

“Because you are so unhappy—so unhappy!” she

cried out in a kind of transport. "We understand each other by that. I love you,—I love you, because you are so unhappy."

I plucked away my hand. Her words brought Jennie Graham to my mind, and I remembered the vague likeness to Jennie Graham in my unfortunate portrait. I had Jennie Graham on the brain! She was beginning to haunt me, apparently! Mrs. Sheriff's repetition of Jennie Graham's words vexed me beyond control. I moved a few paces away.

But she came up to me and seized my hand again, and put her face so close to mine that I felt her breath warm on my cheek. "Listen, you will understand me. Sometimes I think I am hanging to that tree yonder—that tree I love—nailed to it, with two burning nails through the palms of my hands, and my face to the west looking down the bay toward the sunset. Tell me, do you ever think that?"

Her eyes were wild and imploring; there was agony in the broken sound of her voice. "She is mad," I thought again. "You are a sun-worshipper?" I said tolerantly for the sake of saying something.

She looked at me as if she did not quite understand what I said. Then her expression changed to something like ecstasy. "Oh, the sun! I love the sun. Yes, I worship it—that is the right word. I kneel to it, most of all when it is setting. I think when it is going—If this should be the last time I shall ever see it!—If I should die before tomorrow? And then I think that to die means to be merged into all that

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glory, and it is the greatest happiness. You are not angry because I say these things to you—not angry at all? I have always lived here; I have never been anywhere else. I love the sea. And the leaves on the trees now—I love them, the beautiful things, beautiful for themselves alone. Nobody sees them. They grow more beautiful and beautiful and then they die, and nobody has seen them. Sometimes I think they are a little lonesome; that is why I kiss and comfort them. But most times I think that that is the way to be beautiful—only for yourself—to create beauty only for yourself, and care not at all whether it is praised or not. Tell me what you think. I think so much by myself—all day long. All day and often all night. I don't know whether my thoughts are right or not. But you can tell me, because you sympathise with me. You see my soul."

I stared at her, lost in wonder. This spirit so absorbed in a passion for beauty—a far stronger passion than I had myself, perhaps stronger and more disinterested than the passion of any artist living—how it must have starved! What a power of self-repression; what an iron will she had shown to go on living her life in stagnant ugliness, the deliberate elimination of the charm of existence! I thought of her house. How her cabined soul must have beaten against those walls!

"Your trees, decked for themselves alone, are the true aristocrats," I said for the sake of an answer. I was not thinking of what I said.

She looked at the ground with the frown she always had when she was in one of her reveries.

"All my life I have loved beauty," she said slowly at last. "Beauty and love—those are all I care for. I have only been able to find them in nature. I have never been away or seen things. Tell me, should I have found a greater love and beauty than in the trees here, and the sea, and the sunset, and the first star?"

"No," I answered positively. "As to love I cannot speak. But for beauty, you would have found no greater beauty, because the world has no greater beauty to give."

"Do you think they do not love us?"

"I don't know. You, perhaps—you are nearer to them than I am. I think they are indifferent."

She pondered this again in the same way, staring at the ground. "Let us go home," she said at length.

We walked, side by side, in silence. I was not inclined to talk, and even if I had been, it was impossible to talk the vulgar gossip of life to this woman. After we had gone about a quarter of a mile, we came upon the trunk of a fallen tree lying across the path.

"Sit down here," she said.

I placed myself beside her on the log and she threw her arm lightly about my shoulders. Nothing this extraordinary woman did could startle me now. In what way exactly she regarded me, I could not tell; but she had established in her mind some kind of comradeship between us. It would soon be dusk. The far

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shore of the bay was glowing in crimson and orange, with the trees in a black close mass, like a span of velvet below. One star gleamed in the serene air. Far off in the woods a little owl began to cry. In the gathering shadows, she turned on me a face which I could see was quivering with anguish.

"You are so unhappy, so unutterably unhappy. Tell me, have you ever committed a crime?"

I tried to laugh. "Yes, numbers," I said uncomfortably.

"Oh, I don't mean faults—sins. They are of no importance. You mean sins, don't you? But I mean crime, a great crime. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"And have you?"

"No."

"Ah!". . . I do not know what that sigh, which arose from the depths of her stuffed bosom, signified—whether relief, or, shocking as it may sound, disappointment. Her arm dropped from my shoulders.

After a moment she spoke again: "What did you mean when you said that night—you know, the second or third night you were here—that in every house which has been standing many years a corpse lies under the hearthstone? Do you remember? It struck me very much. What did you mean?"

"What did I mean? I don't know what I meant. I spoke just to—— I meant nothing."

"Listen, shall I tell you what I think you meant?"

You meant that people do things, perhaps without thinking, that kill other people. Is that it?"

"Yes, something like that."

"You mean there are many more people who have killed other people than are known?"

"Yes, or than know it themselves even. We are very lucky if we can get through life without killing anybody. Have those who lived in your house before you never killed anybody? Just think a minute. Have they never discharged a dependent unfairly, or in a fit of anger? Perhaps that act eventually killed the dependent, either by rendering him or her hopeless, or in some other way. Did they never leave a man or woman in despair? Did they never nag or humiliate or take unjust advantage? Did they never bear false witness? Did they never put the law in motion to extract the last penny from the poor? Then there are letters that kill. There are a thousand things that kill. Oh, yes, we are very lucky if we get through life without killing somebody."

"Or being killed?" she asked in a whisper.

"There are those that don't kill."

"Is it kill or be killed?"

"No; not that——"

She jumped up from the log and stood before me in the unreal light, looking taller than ever in her black mourning gown. She stretched out her arms full length, with her slender hands loosely open.

"I want you to kill me!" she said.

I shall never forget how she said it. If she had been

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asking me to love her, to kiss her, she could not have looked at me with greater sorcery. "Kill me!" she repeated breathlessly. "No, don't interrupt—hear me out. You will do it, I know, because I love you. I have been waiting for you to come, so long, and when you came I knew you saw my soul. And I said to myself—when I tell him all, when I explain, he will kill me. Listen, it will be quite safe. I have a private fortune; I will leave it all to you. We shall settle the details. Oh, I want to die. Only those who want to die, cannot die. That woman whose funeral I was at today, she wanted to live. I want to die and I have not the courage to kill myself. But you will kill me, my friend."

I sat there motionless under some evil spell.

"You will do it?" she cried, and on her face, which she bent down close to mine, was a smile of wild rapture.

I shuddered: I felt that something terrible and yet lovely was brooding over me. Then, I pulled myself together, and rose sharply to my feet. "What strange things you say, Mrs. Sheriff! You have everything to live for, money and comfort. Your husband will be wondering what has become of you. Let us hurry back."

We walked the rest of the way without speaking another word. I was very much shaken. I was convinced she was irresponsible. She was plainly ill and in agonies of wretchedness. I thought I heard her sob in the darkness. . . .

But at dinner she was still and frigid as usual. She



spoke hardly at all to me, but she no longer avoided my eyes. Two or three times she gazed at me so long and intently that I thought her husband would remark it. I must have had some sympathy with her, as she said; for although I had seen so much misery from poverty and had endured so much misery myself from the same cause that I had little pity for miseries which did not arise from lack of money or were not accompanied by penury, yet I found myself pitying Mrs. Sheriff. I even went so far as to point out to David Sheriff when we were alone together that same evening that his wife's health needed care.

"Oh, she's all right," he mumbled. "She's been like that for years. There's nothing the matter with her."

The next morning, when she came as usual to sit to me for an hour in the loft, which I had chosen on account of the light to work in, she greeted me hardly at all, and seemed more absorbed and restrained and withdrawn from the life around her than ever. Did she even remember how she had been in the wood the day before? It was quite possible she did not. Such outbursts of emotion, I thought, are often followed by a blank. The exhausted spirit can bear no more.

Still, watching her as she sat there listless, I regarded her otherwise than I had done on other mornings. I knew now that there were certain subjects she would respond to. Up to this it had never occurred to me to ask her opinion, any more than the opinion of her husband, about my work. David Sheriff, it is

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true, had shown some interest in his own portrait; what he was anxious about was the likeness, he wanted something that "the boys" would recognise. He used to stand awhile sometimes looking over my shoulder, like children do about a painter who is painting out-of-doors. But she never showed the slightest curiosity; she had never glanced at either picture. She submitted to be painted.

But I remembered this morning that the impression which a woman with a sense of beauty so developed took from a picture would be worth having. I said something like this to her.

She started, roused out of her dream. "My sense of beauty?" she murmured with a wry little smile. "Poor me!"

I turned round her husband's portrait from the wall and held it up before her. She looked hard at it for a little, not at all like a connoisseur of the fine arts, but as one trying rather to gather some fact or facts from it, as if she were reading a letter. Then she sighed.

"It is very good," she said; "very like. It is also very cruel. You were angry when you painted it. You did it against your will, did you not? As for beauty, it is not beautiful at all. Beauty is not hard like that. There is more peace and repose and—what do you call it?—detachment in beauty, I think. That is not beautiful like a tree or a flower; it is ugly, like a man at a tea-party in a small town—our town here."

I was a little nettled, perhaps because what she said

struck home. "I am afraid you are too classic for me," I scoffed. "You are akin to Lessing and Goethe. I hardly dare to show you what I have done with yourself."

The picture was resting on the easel covered with a cloth. "You will bear in mind," I continued, "that it is not quite finished. A strange thing has happened to me with it. I have been trying to paint you, what I saw in you. But what has come out is not you; it as a portrait of somebody I never saw. And yet I saw her *in* you. I have been ill and miserable and poor; perhaps my vision has become affected. But you can judge for yourself. Look!" And I drew away the cloth.

I have said that I was trying to paint my picture in the style of Eugène Carrière. That great artist's power of bringing the body to the very confines of life, of catching the twilight between the temporal and spiritual, of seizing the human frame when it is swooning away and the ghost emerging, I had thought of when I set out to paint this strange Miriam Sheriff. But my work was not a mere imitation of Carrière—that I swear; it was the best picture I had ever painted, or can ever hope now to paint.

Mrs. Sheriff seemed at first unwilling to look at it. Then, visibly putting some constraint on herself, she turned toward the picture resolutely. She gave a low cry and pressed her left hand against her side with her habitual gesture. I thought she was going to fall. But she turned away and hurried from the room.

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Almost before I had time to be astonished I heard her light foot on the stairs coming up again. She put a photograph into my hands.

"Is that the face you saw?" she asked.

It was the photograph of a young woman dressed after the fashion of fifteen or twenty years ago. She had a handsome face, very unusual; and it was this face I had painted. But in the photographed face there was something sensual, defiant, even sullen; whereas in my picture it was as if the same woman had passed through some purgatory and come forth a thousand times purified.

"It is my sister Abigail," said Mrs. Sheriff. "I never *see* her like that photograph. I always see her, just behind my eyes, with that look of forgiving as she is in your picture. That is how she looked a few minutes before she died." She paused, and then added quietly: "I murdered her."

"For Heaven's sake, don't say such a terrible thing!"

"That face is what you saw *in* me, as you said just now. I knew all the time you were seeing it and drawing it out of me. I made up my mind several days ago to tell you all about it. I am going to tell you."

"Not here in this house?"

She glanced carelessly round the walls. "Well, no. Perhaps not in the house. I had rather be out in the open. You remember that tree where you saw me yesterday? Go there this afternoon."

I was first at the tryst by a good hour. It looked as if she were not coming, and I felt infinitely relieved. I ought to have resisted her impulse to make me her confidant. If she had a tragedy in her life, why should I burthen myself with it? Surely I had enough already to weigh me down. That portrait—what flaw in eye or brain, what casting-off from the wharves of life and voyaging into the unpathed seas of the invisible world, did that portend?

But when, at last, I sighted her in the distance, the forebodings which had been so heavy upon me since morning suddenly appeared idle. Perhaps the reason was that she was not garbed in black, as she had been yesterday, but wore the many-coloured costume of a woman who lives in the country and is much out-of-doors. These healthy clothes, the soft hat she had on, her bright muffler, her rough gloves and her walking-stick, took her out of the isolation in which I had been seeing her, and established a relation between her and ordinary, average women of commonplace existence. Her appearance now was so inconsistent with the vision of her making that appalling confession in the morning that—I reminded myself once more—that she must be suffering from hallucinations and that she had perhaps forgotten by this time why she had brought me there.

But when she was drawing near, a little breathless as if she had hurried, I saw the countenance—cold, and indifferent, and repelling in advance any attempt at intimacy—which she kept for the town, vanish, really

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as if she had cast off a mask; and there came into her haunted eyes a look of even more intense anguish than I had seen yesterday.

"You won't be able to worship the sun this afternoon," I said, in a trivial tone, attempting to start the conversation.

It was indeed a dull, soundless day, with low-hanging clouds. Ever and anon the sun, concealed by clouds, sent forth a shaft of light which was not sunshine. The bay lay glassy smooth, the colour of slate. The leaves had lost their colour and looked dead and shrivelled on the branches, ready to fall. While I had been sitting still there, I had actually *heard* them dying, a strange dim crackling noise which began, and then ceased, and began once more. . . .

I had spoken to her, as I say, in jest, but in her reply was great solemnity.

"I don't think I shall ever be able to look at the sun again. Not since I saw what I saw this morning."

She meant my picture. "You make too much of it," I said to soothe her.

"Abigail, my sister, and I used to come to this place when we were quite little," she went on dreamily. "She used to stand with her back against that tree over there, to see if she was taller than I was. How strange that seems after all this time! She always wanted to be taller than I was. David Sheriff, who is my husband now, used to measure us. He used to

cut notches in the tree. I wonder if they are there still? I never thought to look till now.

"He was our cousin, but much older than we were. I loved David when I was a little girl; and when I grew up I loved him. He loved Abigail, but she cared nothing at all for him. We had not much money then. David's father was well-to-do, but Abigail and I lived with our mother, who was a widow. Then sister made up her mind to go to Boston and take up business there. It was the best thing she could do if she would not marry David. She was always quarrelsome with mother—with me, too.

"I don't know just what she did in Boston. Mother used to send her money sometimes. She was cashier in some large store. She got mixed up with a man who was also employed in the store, and he persuaded her to steal money for him. It must have been for him. Then they found her out and arrested her.

"David was going to marry me. I was so glad and so was mother. But when this news came he hurried to Boston. He stood up in court and said he had always loved her, and that if they would let her go he would marry her and pay back the money she had taken. They did let her go on these terms, and sister married him at once.

"That was like a knife in my side. I had begun to get my trousseau together. Now there was no more hope. What made it worse was that the very first night they came home, I saw that Abigail hated David, though he was crazy about her. She only loved the

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man for whom she had stolen, and he had disappeared.

"She was surly and hard and defiant. She looked as she looks in that photograph I showed you; it was taken a few days after they came home. She was unwell. She had a cold when she arrived and coughed a good deal. She didn't seem to care. Soon she had to stay in bed.

"I went over from mother's to nurse her. Sister was terribly querulous and unkind to everybody, but especially to David. She accused him of forcing her into marriage, and declared that she would never be a wife to him.

"She got worse, and the thought came to me from outside my head—I remember that quite well—it seemed to enter my head from outside: If she was to die, David would be free.

"Then one evening the doctor came, and said she was much better. She looked better. She was not going to die after all! And a terrible thing came into my head. It was something the doctor said that suggested it. It was a rough winter night with a terrific gale up—I don't think I have ever heard the wind blow so loud since. The doctor gave sister a sleeping-powder and said she must be kept warm. 'If she gets through this night well,' he told us, 'she will mend quickly.' Then he said as he was going that he hoped the windows and doors were strong or the wind might blow them in.

"I was to sit up all night with sister. When the



clock struck one I looked at her. She was sleeping well with her head on her arm; she was very warm and her skin was moist. We were in that room you have now: you know it almost faces the stairs and the street door. We had padded the cracks in the door to keep out the draughts, for the bed was near the door and it had not been possible to move it.

"I stole downstairs and opened the street door. Then I went back upstairs and left the bedroom door open and drew the blankets off sister. The icy wind came streaming into the room. I opened the window to make more of a draught, and sat there shivering, hoping it would kill me too. I did not want to live; I only wanted David to be free from the unhappy life before him with sister.

"After a while she stirred and began to cough. But she did not wake up. Cough—cough—cough—I hear that often. But she never woke up. About half-past four I went down and shut the door. If anybody had passed and seen the door open he would have thought it was the gale. But nobody passed.

"I came upstairs again and closed the bedroom door and the window. Then something terrible happened. I heard steps coming slowly upstairs—heavy, deliberate steps like an old man's. Then there came three loud knocks at the door. I jumped into the bed beside sister and covered my head with the blankets. I wonder I did not die from terror. I waited to hear the steps go away from the door. But they did not go away. It was death that had come.

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"Sister woke up and began to cry. She was much worse. When David was up he went for the doctor. But sister Abigail died toward nightfall." . . .

We had been standing all this time. There was a distorted smile about her mouth. Then she pressed her fingers to her breast, and turned round and stood with her back to me.

"Perhaps it was not that," I said at last, uneasily, in a low voice.

"Yes, it was that. The doctor said she must have got a sudden chill——"

We were silent again, for a long time. I could think of nothing to say. At last, wanting to say something, I stammered: "You have your husband, the man you love——"

She turned round quickly. Her eyes were quite dry. The imploring smile had gone from her face.

"Yes, I have him," she replied in a hard voice. "You see what he is. That is my punishment."

Then she looked at me intently, straight into the eyes. "Now you hate me," she said.

"Hate you? Oh, you poor creature!"

"Then kiss me," she said, "if you cannot hate me."

I took her head between my hands and kissed her on the forehead.

"Will you kill me *now*?" she whispered insidiously.

"Oh, my God—no."

"But you were sent for that. That is what the picture means."

"I don't know what it means. But not that. Never think it."

"Then good-bye—and forever—my friend, my brother."

She walked quickly away in the dusk and I did not follow her.

She did not appear at dinner that evening; she had a headache, her husband said. About nine o'clock I went up to the loft and cut my picture into strips. I felt as if I were stabbing a living creature. I burned the strips in the stove which was there. Then I came down and told David Sheriff that I had fulfilled the contract for his own portrait, but that I found I could make no headway with the portrait of Mrs. Sheriff and so I was going away in the morning.

"Call yourself a painter?" he said. "Why, she ought to be easier than me. She can sit still, I know that." He chuckled, but he was evidently put out.

"I daresay Mr. Abner can find you some one else——"

"Well, no. I guess not. I guess it's my picture the folks want to see down in that library."

He added that he used to do some drawing himself in his young days. "Over there in the woods, near the bay, I used to draw my cousins. I used to stand them against a tree and cut notches in it to mark their height."

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A few months later Abner showed me a newspaper which he had received from David Sheriff. It was a local paper and it gave a full account of the opening of the Abigail Sheriff Memorial Library. My portrait of David Sheriff had been much praised by the orators. There was no mention of a portrait of Mrs. Sheriff, and it was said that she herself had been absent from the ceremony, "owing to illness."

# EASY

BY

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THE BELLS OF CULLAM—*Scribner's Magazine*

SQUAW—*Collier's Weekly*

THE MIRACLE OF NEITH—*Pictorial Review*

THE ARABIAN DAYS OF JIMMY JENNETTE—*Century Magazine*



## VI

### EASY .

**B**IG JIM GLAIVE came slowly out from the yawning door of the East River electric powerhouse, stuffing his pay envelope under the flap of his flannel shirt pocket. He blinked at the moist sun of a Saturday afternoon in April; shifted his heavy boots restlessly on the cobbles; and turned to sniff the river-front smells.

Rough pavement led up a steep incline from the runway, disappeared under a stone arch, and eventually tapped the transverse arteries of the city. To the right the street led straight to a stubby wharf, built to withstand the onslaught of surging currents. In the crowded channel tugs snorted and churned, wide-winged sloops and schooners slid, dipped and tacked. Stately white passenger steamers glided by. Rusty black freighters, showing raw red stripes above the water, nosed ahead like busy hounds on a fresh scent. Barges, out of ballast, threaded together like giant, oblong beads, wallowed in the wake of a disgruntled, puffing guide. The wind was strong and salt, savoured and spiced with odours of tar and pitch, scents of strange cargoes, mixed with the acrid smells of factories. Across the narrow reach of rush-

ing waters loomed the grim prison buildings of the city-owned Island, grey edifices, giving from behind their barred windows no sign of life in all the moving pageant of pleasure and profit.

Jim sniffed the wind. Contented, in an indifferent sort of way, when once inside his workshop, the call of the water-way "got him" night and morning. There was always a sullen hunching of his shoulders as day in and day out he turned his back on the lure of the out-path, and plodded homeward over the uneven pavements, the rhythm of his step growing ever slower as he neared the Second Avenue flat, where Ellen and the kids awaited his return. To-day the misty gold of spring hung over the face of the river. Its soiled waters seemed clean and inviting. Big Jim was very loath to leave the roll and swirl, and face the grind and jar. He stood so long that the throng of his fellow workers had been engulfed in the shadows under the arch, and he was left alone on the threshold of the shop.

"Hi!—Hey, there, Jim! You—Jim Glaive, you old ———!" and there followed a string of the glowing insults wherewith they that go down to the sea in the ships greet one another.

Jim turned, his sullen face brightened; a slow grin pulled his huge mouth askew. "By Cripes!" he exclaimed. "If it ain't Whispy Lungen. You old sinner, where away from? you ———!" and he countered with another string of opprobrious epithets in a tone of unaffected heartiness.



The two men clapped hands, as giants meet, in a bone-crushing spasm of reunion.

"Ten year," bellowed 'Whispy,' who topped his tall friend by several inches. "All of ten year, you old steer-jostler. What ye doin' down here, hangin' on the edge of this here juice factory?"

Jim felt suddenly ashamed of his job. His tone was apologetic as he answered, "Work here. Always was strong with the juice, holding down a good thing, too, Whispy, big pay, steady work."

"Gawd!" exploded Lungen. "Settled down to a steady job! G'wan! How do ye do it? I've been round the world a dozen times, since the night you was sandbagged in Seattle. What the hell do ye see in this dump to keep ye here? Chuck it, Jim, chuck it. Say, I got a grand little thing on, and you're just the lad I'm lookin' fer. If you want to fiddle with the juice, I can fix ye fer that and deep-sea, too. Come along wid me, Glaive, and I'll soak out yer dried up hide. You—in them shops! Aw, hell!"

Every atom of desire awoke in Jim at the picture the words evoked. He stared at his old bunkmate. What wouldn't he give for the freedom Whispy offered! Yet the routine of his present life had been sweet once. Once it had been as if the storm-battered ship had struggled to snug anchorage in a safe harbour. But ships were made to sail again. Now—he was a hulk rotting at an ignominious wharf where children played, *his* children. He looked with burning eyes at the former companion of many a rough adventure. The

giant frame was unchanged in the ten years that had elapsed since the Seattle carouse, that had come so near to a fatal ending. But Whispy's face was altered. Two new scars, one fresh healed, adorned his left cheek, his square jaw was leaner; the furrows between the horizon-searching eyes were deeper, the puckers at the corners heavy, like the mouth of a corded purse; the lines from nose to mouth were gashes, slashed deep by violent emotions and crude dissipation. But about the man was an air of gay effrontery and self-confidence that lent him a certain coarse glamour, a certain rakish attraction. Glaive's gaze travelled down and fixed on his friend's hands. They were huge and rough, calloused white in spots, red as beef at wrist and knuckles. Slowly Jim lifted his own and looked at them. They were grimed by black smears, but in shape and texture they were the hands of an artisan.

"Bah!" he said.

Lungen slapped him hard on the back. "Well, me Bucko, we'll fix them mawlers. Couldn't handle a tarred rope now, hey? We all gets soft, lyin' in port. Veer about and ye'll be a man again. Lord; but it's grand to see yer! I never found a better lad than you, from Fiji to Toosko Sound. D'ye mind when we went on the rocks in that old hulk of a beef roller, and the steers broke loose? Why, man, if I live to be a hundred I'll never forget the wallop you fetched that gorin' skewbald with the pen billet. Gosh, it about saved my gizzard! And the typhoon we weath-

ered goin' down to Chili on the old *Mariposa*, do ye remember? Some blow, hey? And, say, do ye mind that harpahaoeli girl on Maui? Some looker, what! For two cents you'd a set up housekeeping with that Kanaka, only fer me haulin' you off. She's married now, to the white superintendent of the Maunakala Plantation. Reed told me. Frank Reed, you remember? Neiman Company's copra hound."

Jim Glaive nodded. Memories came crowding, of charging, bellowing steers in the narrow runways of a listing cattle ship. The roar of a water spout whirling not half a mile from a helpless, wallowing square rigger. The shriek of the coming tornado; wrecks and wrecks, flotsam and jetsam; blows struck and given. Aye, and kisses given and implored—black-eyed Haiiaka of Maui—and Ratu of Tahiti, with her blue tattaa, and others and others. And now he was on his way home to Ellen and the children, Mamie and Louie, whining Jane-Elizabeth, ailing Bobbie and the squealing, rolling, bubbling, sniffing infant, with its eternal whimper and red, puffy lids! A wave of loathing swept over him, of resentment against Ellen. Why in hell was she eternally having the damned kids, and why, if she *had* to have 'em, couldn't she keep 'em decent? Hadn't he taken pride in his first-born, Mamie, even lugging her around in her baby carriage? Mamie had been a good-lookin' baby. Ellen was forever slickin' her up, with ribbons and starch, to make the neighbours jealous—jealous—huh!—jealous!

His silence evidently puzzled Lungen. "What's chawin' yer? What's the grouch? Say, come along wid me. Come on to the Dock Rat, and have a snoot o' grog for old time's sake. You sure are a sight for sore eyes!"

The words 'sore eyes' decided Glaive; they brought the baby clearly before him. He knew Ellen would be anxiously watching the clock. She wanted, he knew, to go to see her sister in the hospital—but, hell! couldn't he never have a minute off for himself? Christ! what a fool a man was to marry! He fumed, shook himself, threw his disagreeable thoughts into the discard, and turned to Lungen with his slow-stretching smile.

"Go to it, you old soused mackerel," he said. "I'm game for a little has-been talk. There's them at home as can wait."

Lungen looked at him sharply. "Don't tell me you're spliced!" he exclaimed.

Glaive nodded. "Huh, huh." He did not dare look at his companion, he knew of old that expression of disgusted mirth.

"You boob, you poor, ordinary boob! So one of 'em pinched yer, did she? The way they hooks on and drags a feller out is worse'n one of them cargo derricks grabbin' a bale out of the hold. You simp—you poor simp! I should have stayed 'longside of yer and saved yer, so I should. Hurry along, the drinks is on me. You sure do need a little getaway, you poor, ordinary simp!" he reiterated.

"She's a grand good looker." Glaive tried to appear proud and satisfied. The attempt was not convincing.

"I don't say she ain't," Lungen came back, "but, *marry*—what's the use when you're a live man? Not that I haven't been let in myself. I've a widder in San Francisco—got a feller to write her how I was washed overboard from the *Powhatan*. And there's a wife Nagasaki-way. But, say, how long's this been goin' on?"

"Eight years," Glaive admitted reluctantly.

"Eight years—*eight* years! Why, man, ye must be dead. Kids, I suppose?"

"Five of 'em," said the electrician; "oldest seven, youngest six months—both kinds," he laughed grimly.

"Whew!" whistled Lungen. "Well, it's *your* life you're livin'—not mine—five kids! and in a city, too! Well, here we are, and after the earful you just give me, I'm needin' several pegs o' the hard."

He led the way through the green-slatted door of a corner dive that hung at an angle over the water.

Glaive licked dry lips reminiscently. Ellen kept tight hold of his pay envelope and saw to it that very little went to the Mikes and Jerrys who tended bar in the neighbourhood. He thought angrily that he hadn't stood up to a glass and a free lunch since the souse he had acquired on Jane-Elizabeth's birthday, a month before. Ellen had given him such 'what for' then that he hadn't wanted to, it wasn't worth

while. What a sight she had looked, with her hair in wisps hanging about her narrow shoulders, the tears dripping thick down her cheeks, her mouth contorted, her lean arm tense; and her red, suds-slicked hand gripping the rolling-pin that she shook at him as she croaked with fury. "Good looker," he had called her! "Gawd! how could any woman let herself go that way? There had been excuse for his infatuation when he had met her—trim and neat figured, ripe cheeked, and with eyes that glittered at you. Yes, she had been pretty enough, and smart enough to hold many a man's eyes and thought. And she hadn't hooked him like a cargo derrick, either, though he dearly wished he could blame her for the whole mishap of marriage. But she hadn't liked him at first; was repelled, wouldn't give to his eager love-making; which had only driven his passion the more, till he had *made* her marry him. Well, she had had it out of him. Gawd! she was even with him now! He clinked his glass against Lungen's with unnecessary violence—a defiance directed at Ellen. His mental processes were wholly personal. He never for one moment realised the raw-rubbed life of his overworked, exhausted wife. His resentment against her, against the children, against the inevitable ugliness and wear of the crowded home was the same instinct in the male that forces the wild female animal to drive her mate from her, that her young may be safe. Imaginatively sensitive to the new and strange, he was totally without constructive imagination of the Usual. He could enter into

no life save his own, and what made that distasteful he hated.

"Drink hearty!" said Lungen, and Big Jim Glaive drank.

Ellen Glaive sat at the window of her flat, the sore-eyed baby on her knees. For the moment the place was quiet. Jane-Elizabeth and Louie were in charge of Mamie, and Robbie had gone over to the Park to play with the Maxwitz children from across the hall. Mrs. Maxwitz, moreover, promised to keep an eye on the baby when Jim should come back to go with her to the hospital on Saint Mark's Square. She glanced angrily at the cheap alarm clock on the mantelpiece. Hadn't he no better sense than to take overtime work on this day of all days—when her sister?—but overtime was double pay, and there'd be need of the extra money. He couldn't be much longer now. She put the baby down on a soiled pillow, where it promptly bent itself into an arc and began a hoarse, angry wailing. She turned to the kitchen. *If* she stayed at the hospital, if she should *have* to stay, dinner must be ready for Jim and the children. She'd send Jim back in good time. Mamie could tend to the serving, and could be trusted to know when the stew was stewed. She fussed about the kitchen, anxiously listening all the while for his familiar step on the landing. The baby continued to cry. She shrugged her lean shoulders angrily. Oh, the everlasting grind of it all—over and over again! She fingered a heap of newly

washed infant belongings, and noted the dilapidation of the little dresses with a sigh. But what could you expect? They had been handed along from one to another of the brood, until now William's inheritance was sorely tattered. There were some of the best ones still in the trunk. Those she had made when she was expecting Mamie, had stitched herself with such excited, thrilling fingers; yes, and embroidered them, too. Poor William! It was precious little time she had now to lavish, even on his wants. "Might as well use thim up!" she said aloud, downing the inward protest that wanted to retain the little garments as keepsakes—keepsakes of what? Of a few happy years. "Use thim up," she repeated, "what's the use?"

She entered the inner bedroom and turned on the gas. But getting no responsive gleam, she crossed fretfully to the bureau, and taking a quarter from her lean purse, grudgingly fed the meter box. The light blazed up weakly. Then she removed the damaged, red plush curtain that disguised the trunk, and lifting the lid, stood looking down at the revealed contents. In one corner lay a neat, crisp pile of tiny clothes. She did not look at them, but at a framed photograph of herself and Jim in their wedding finery. She had taken it off the mantelpiece and thrown it into the trunk in anger, that time Jim had come home speechless and reeling on Mamie's birthday. The photograph brought back the, by no means unusual, episode with fresh force. Suppose that was what kept him now. He had his pay. "Huh!" she sneered savagely, "he'd



not dare. Sure, if he does!"—surge after surge of anger coursed in her blood. She picked up the picture and looked at it with aching eyes. She'd been like that once, eight years ago. And now, what with child-bearing and work, and always more work, and less strength to work with.—She glanced in the looking glass over the dresser.—She was a rag! a dish-mop—and she not thirty! She glowered back at the photograph, her likeness of eight years before, trim and trig, with smooth, round cheeks and black eyes that glittered; heavy brown hair that coiled and recoiled around her head, and a pompadour that had needed no fluffing. She had paid twenty-five cents to the hair-dresser for fixing it for the wedding, and how well it had held her veil. And her dress—a bought bride's dress, it was, from Fourteenth Street—none of your made-at-home things. And how well it showed up in the picture, a sharp white shine on each angular fold. And Jim—Ah, he was a fine figure of a man, she conceded resentfully. *He* had not suffered, nor worked his hands off, nor endured bitter weariness, sickness and pain, and forever the rack of child-bearing. *He* hadn't sacrificed anything, not he. His home was made comfortable for him, and the best of everything was for him. Mended and tended and fed, he was, happy as a king should be. And him comin' home soused, a dozen times in the year, wastin' his money, *her* money, the children's money. How could a man let himself go like that? Hadn't she told him when she said she'd marry him, that he'd have to

leave the drink alone? Hadn't he bullied her and harried her into marrying? Hadn't she turned him down many's the time? Ah, well, he was even with her now. He had taken it out of her. A woman was a fool to marry when there's good positions to be had, and fair play, and independence. Would he help her out when he came home? Not he! He acted as if comin' home at all was a favour. Would he mind the baby? Not he! Or help straighten the place a bit, or put his hand to a dish, except to eat his fill and quarrel with the food. And if she said a word, sure, it was up and out for him to play pinochle with Maxwitz; or go over to the Morris Sullivan Political Headquarters. Dumb fury shook her at the thought. Did *she* ever have a moment's freedom?—never! not even when it was a necessity that called her out—and he all day long outside to himself, with plenty of company and all the fun of factory life. Were his hands torn and rough and cracked like hers—no fear! And here she was, shamed with the looks of her own children; hating the young woman in the flat below, flaunting her one clean baby. Gawd!—wait, just wait till the children come one after another, without rest between. Give her two years, three—Ah, the kill of it all! She'd learn that life's a hell, all right, when ye can't live like humans! Five kids, and the pay envelope that thin! Savagely she gloated over her neighbour's future misery. Work, work, work, work—how could any one keep a brood clean and mended and decent with no help at all? Didn't a man owe it to his wife

to help, when she'd mothered his children and made his home? She who'd got nothing in return for all her giving except a roof over her head, and a crust to eat herself when the children were half-fed. And what had Jim Glaive ever given up for her? His gaddin'—nothing but his *gaddin'*! And what was there in that? The right to turn longshoreman or tramp; the right to go dirty and sleep on the docks; the right to get poisoned by vile liquor, and cussed at by wharf-saloon hussies. And here was Saturday night comin' on, and him not home. There was Maria in the hospital, and the surgeons cuttin' her that very day, and her own sister not able to get over to be on hand if they killed her. Ellen straightened her bent back, threw down the photograph and slammed the trunk lid, forgetful of the little heap of clean dresses.

The wailing baby gagged and coughed. The gasping breath sent a stab of fright to her heart. Her experiences had been many and terrifying with her sickly brood. She hurried to the front room, caught up the infant and patted it quickly, crooning the while. Tears poured from its eyes; its mouth was fixed in a stiffened square from which no sound issued. Then it yelled, choked and flipped itself like a piece of animated whalebone.

The door opened without the ceremony of knocking, and Mrs. Maxwitz came in, wiping her hands on her blue apron.

"Say, Mrs. Klaive, dot's a bad holler the baby got. Ain't the man home already yet?"

"No, he ain't," snapped Ellen, looking at the alarm clock with vicious eyes. "There, there," she hummed, patting the baby's back, "that's the boy." The baby's congested face paled to its normal shade, the coughing ceased.

Mrs. Maxwitz crossed to her neighbour's side and looked at the child with sharp, diagnosing eyes. "He don't look just right, I don't think so. You leave 'em and go to the hospital. Dr. Forbling by an' by come to see Maxwitz's rheumacks. I show him the baby then. I leave the door open so I hear when he come, your man. I tell your man you gone by the hospitals. If you want to get back by tinner yet, you bedder go now."

Ellen nodded sullen thanks, and handed over the baby. Mrs. Maxwitz laid the infant across her ample front, after the manner of a plaster, and broke into a high-pitched, nasal chant, rocking herself from side to side rhythmically, as she watched Ellen Glaive throw on the long grey raglan that covered her soiled and faded dress, and thrust her feet into rubbers. The soles of her shoes were worn in holes, but she had neither the time nor the energy to go out and buy herself a new pair. With a last look at the slow-simmering stew-pot, Ellen turned away, clumped down the narrow stairs to the street, and headed toward the hospital.

Her mind still boiling with resentment, she was hardly aware of the soft air of Spring or the warm afternoon light that beautified even the city's ugliness.

Why were things so hard? Why was the world so hateful? Why were men so worthless and selfish? Why was the lure of youth and spring, and that thing called 'love'—Ah, yes—she had known it once—why was its deadly sweetness nothing but a poison? Why was her man impatient of the children? Why must she keep on having them, since they meant nothing but want and ill will? She did not formulate the hundred questions that beset her, rather they seethed, each an impulse of anger, making her cast black looks at man and maid, as they passed by in the Saturday evening stir of humanity released from work. Before the hospital she stopped short, gazing up at its imposing front with a look of frightened awe. She had all the tenement house woman's fear of The Institution. Anything like a public building frightened her, were it Court, Library, Museum, Orphan Asylum or Hospital, she was afraid. Each typified strange doings and goings on that were regulated by unfeeling human machines. To go to the hospital meant death at the hands of doctors, unaccountable even to God, who pried into people's innards for their own pleasure or information. Asylums meant either insanity or the kidnapping of children delivered into bondage—*better death than that!* Courts were openings into prisons. Prisons were pesthouses of disgrace.

She shuddered as she looked up at the grey façade before her, and compelled her unwilling limbs to mount the short steps of the entrance. She had a creeping feeling that she would be set upon from behind, be-

numbed with gas, carried off to some terrible room and cut open.

And Jim, who should have been there to protect her, hadn't come home.

She clutched her coat about her, and walked down the echoing corridor to the desk, timidly whispering her request for information to the uniformed official. In dazed fear and anxiety she took her seat in the waiting-room. Her anger against Jim and Life in general faded before the white tiled, strange smelling imminence of Death.

"Mrs. Glaive?" called a voice.

Ellen looked up into cold grey eyes, and beheld a young woman in white, one of those iron-hearted nursing women, who starve the sick; and themselves eat the good pigs' feet and stewed tripe brought by anxious relatives.

"Your sister is doing very well," the nurse said briskly. "We won't know, of course, for a few days. No, you can't see her. Visitors' hours eleven to twelve. Ward 10."

She was gone before Ellen could formulate any of the questions that trembled on her lips. Then she fled, fled to the safety of the street, blind and dumb with the horror of those cavernous, destroying wards of The Institution. She shivered—if ever it came to that for her—for the kids—no—never—never! What was the river for, anyway? It was big enough for all of 'em. She stumbled in her haste. Jim—Jim—where in the name of Gawd was Jim?

"Drink hearty!" said Lungen, and Big Jim Glaive drank. He had ceased to count the number of his drinks. The pay envelope had been opened. One bill had shrunk to a few bits of 'change.' The envelope no longer lay secure under the buttoned flap of his shirt breast pocket, but was thrust carelessly into his trousers. His great frame rested in the chair, relaxed and loose-jointed. His face was flushed, and a little dew of perspiration showed at the roots of the strong, upthrusting hair upon his forehead. His eyes sparkled, his slow smile was fixed, yet the liquor had not taken full hold upon him. He was perfectly clear of eye, head and speech; but he had thrown back ten years. Under the magic of this unexpected reunion he was again the reckless roustabout, self-confident Jack-of-all-trades of his youth. Responsibility had slipped from him. He was no longer a member of the community, having a stake in its welfare and future. With a shake of his huge shoulders, he had dismissed the whole thing. Group consciousness and Responsibility have to be bred in the bone, ingrained in childhood, established in manhood, if it is to exist at all. Glaive had no group consciousness. The responsibilities he had assumed existed only as a hindering harness he had put on, not consciously feeling that he might at any moment throw it off, but with the under, subconscious regardlessness that had never allowed him to accept the yoke and strain at traces and collar.

"Ye see," Lungen was saying, "it's a big deal. Big chances, too; but what's that to men like you and me?"

We've shipped on munition ships before, haven't we? And sailed with picric acid in bum containers, ain't we? Well, what if this is filibusterin'? That's none of our lookout, except that we draw down the big pay. And, believe me, you with your juice—why, to get an electrician on this trip, one that I'll O. K.—they'll have to come across. And, say, Old Timer, what won't we do to one of them tropic jamborees? Ever dance them 'meranges' in Hayti? Say, now, call it 'done' and I'll wise the owners of this expedition that they've got a first-class man, and'll have to pay for him."

Glaive hesitated, his eyes on the saloon clock had shocked him with the lateness of the hour, and the recollection of Ellen waiting for him to take her over to the hospital.

Lungen saw and interpreted the look. "Cut it, Glaive. Don't let that wife-and-kids bunk get you. She'll forage along without you better'n with you. She'll get on the city pay roll all right, all right. Are you goin' to spend yer life hangin' around a skirt? Cut it, I say, cut it out. What's Institutions for, I ask you, except for women and kids? That's what all them boobs up on Fi't Avenoo are taxed for, ain't it? Well, there you are. And if you want to send 'em a slice of yer pay now an' again, what's to stop yer? My Gawd! this juice factory stuff of yours—seven to five—steady work and overtime! *That* ain't livin', an' you know it!"

Big Jim rose from his chair and shook himself.

"Where'll I meet you?" he said.



"*Meet me!*" Lungen slapped his recruit on the shoulder, bodily jamming him back into his chair. "No, you don't! You come along wid me. You don't go back and have no riot with your old woman, and go soft on me and back out. That ain't the way to do it. *Just don't show up.* If I can't hide yer till sailin' time, then I'm a simp. Just don't show up—that's the dope."

A stubborn light came into Glaive's eyes, and Lungen was wise enough to cease insisting.

"Nope," Jim said, "I ain't goin' to have no riot, not me. But I'm goin' to leave her what's here," (he struck the pay envelope in his pocket,) "and I'm goin' to tell her I'll be out late. If I don't, she'll be over to the factory and jolt up the watchman; and how'd I know she won't find out and foller? You don't know her. Where'll I meet you?"

"Know Crandes, across from the Canal basin?" inquired Lungen. "All right, I'm goin' straight there. You follow me as soon as you get loose. Needn't ask for me, my room's right at the top of the first stair. You're a fool to go back to yer dump, but you was a fool to ever get into it. *And don't you turn soft on me.*"

"I won't," said Glaive, and banged out through the swinging saloon door.

Lungen had been right to warn against his return home. It was a shred of decency, of "softness" that still held and drew Jim, and, once unaccompanied and in the open street, a vague feeling of shame began to

nag at him. After all it was a pretty raw deal to give Ellen. Ellen would miss him. Ellen loved him—but so had many women in the past, and he had left them behind without a thought to haunt him, or a regret for their absence. But eight years of habit and life are not to be thrust aside thus lightly, and it was habit that drew him now, in this small matter of the customary return at the end of the day, the turning over of the week's pay, even though it was his intention to break away utterly. But as his feet walked on automatically, his unwilling mind was busy. Time had turned his hour-glass. The sands were rising the other way. He was his old irresponsible self again. The call of Duty, the very demands of the flesh and blood he had helped to create, seemed illusion. Only the future, the future of adventure, and danger, of high pay, long chances and violent changes, was real. He paused before the narrow entrance of the tenement that was his home. On the right a grocery store spread faded, limp vegetables to the dust of the street, and flowered its fly-specked window display with highly coloured posters of food products. A dingy entry led to Maxwitz's cobbler shop on the left, Maxwitz with whom he played pinochle. Glaive shrugged and sneered. That a life for a *Man*—huh! Across the street a gaily-lettered sign on the second floor declared the rooms "The Morris Sullivan Club." Down the street, gilding the drab corner, was "Jerry's Saloon." These, and the narrow entrance before him, had been his life for eight years! With an uplift of

rebellion Jim's hate of Ellen rushed back to him. Eight years thrown away, wasted—all for what? That ill-tempered, sickly slattern. He drew himself up pridefully, conscious of his great height and bulk, his powerful shoulders, and whipcord thews. Yah! whose fault was it the blamed kids were sickly? Not *his*, anyway. With a snort of relief he threw the blame of his actions, past and future, on his forlorn partner. What had made her a sickly slattern, he did not ask himself. She *was* one, and that was enough.

What he was going to do would serve her right, and if the haul was too hard, she could get on the city's pay roll. That was what Institutions were for; Lungen had said it. Then Habit took him bodily and forced him up the stairs. At the door he hesitated. Ellen would raise a row at his late arrival. Well, let her, he could afford to stand it, it would be the last time. The door to the flat opposite opened with a jerk, and Mrs. Maxwitz spoke sharply in a tense, sibilant whisper.

"Come by here."

Mechanically he obeyed, chilled by something ominous in her tone.

"You put us now all in a fine blace," she complained. "Look what you gettin', you an' your wife. You don't come home an' I gotter mind the baby. Like I ain't got enough trouble by me now already. Dr. Forbling come by-an-by for Maxwitz' rheumack, an' say your baby got bad throught—sick—dif—dif—fiffentheria, he say it. See, you got sign on door—

nobody go out—nobody come in—or go hospital, I dunno. He come back. What for you not come home when you got time? Your wife gone to sister. Now I gotter get thissen sick for me an' my man an' my child!"

"Diphtheria!" exclaimed Glaive, a mixture of fury and relief rising in him. "Wouldn't you know Ellen's kids would go and get some damned thing like that, wouldn't yer!" his mind was saying, while his evil desires prodded. "You got the excuse to beat it and get a good start!" Aloud he said sharply to the wailing neighbour, "Look here, Mrs. Maxwitz, you tell Ellen it won't do for me to hang around no ketchin'-sick kid. I'd lose my job—see? I'll go and get a room somewheres. Tell her she ain't to worry if she don't hear from me—see? They wouldn't keep me at the shops if they thought I was round with nothin' like that. I gotter stay away. And, say, you tell that doctor to keep an eye on Ellen and the kids; and if things gets bad, *he'll* know about the hospitals all right. I ain't no good in this sort of thing. And, say, here's the pay envelope. Give her that." He scooped up the small change in his pocket and added it, dribbling into Mrs. Maxwitz's extended hand. "Tell her I had to break a bill—to—pay back a feller I owed. Tell her to talk it over with that doctor of yours. I gotter beat it an' get a room somewhere. Tell her she ain't to worry." He ran downstairs and out into the street. "Gee! that was easy!" he exclaimed aloud as he turned the corner and dove into

a side street. With hands crammed in empty pockets, head held high, and nostrils that sniffed the evening wind, he turned into First Avenue and began to plod steadily south to Crandes' by the Canal basin. "Easy," he repeated, "dead easy!"

Easy?—

Early in the morning, five days after Jim's desertion, a policeman pushed roughly through the group of excited people jammed in the hall before the door of the Glaives' tenement.

"Hey! Stand back there! Get out, or I'll club some of ye!"

The crowd of frightened women and children fell back, clutching one another, as they were forced up and down the narrow stairs, by those who scrouged hastily away from the threatening presence of Roundsman Brady, their familiar street-corner standby.

"Mein Gott! Mein Gott!" Mrs. Maxwitz's voice was raised in a shriek of appeal. "Qvick, Meester Braty!"

The policeman set his shoulder against the closed door, brought back his body with a jerk, and landed his full weight above the lock. There was a splintering crash. The inner bolt still held, but through the broken panel, a seepage of ominous vapour fouled the already gas-laden air of the passage. Brady coughed, bent low, and again flung himself against the door. It burst inward; with cries of fright the crowd pushed further back from the noxious fumes.

The officer dashed across the room; tore out the

strips of cotton cloth, that sealed the ill-fitting sash, and jerked up the window. For some minutes he leaned far over the sill, while the rush of gas swept by him. Then he turned and looked at the cloth still in his hand. It was the remnant of a baby's dress. The tatters of other tiny garments had been thrust into every crevice of the door and window.

"Plugged the whole place up with 'em," he said aloud. "Her baby's clothes! Well, that's a new wrinkle, anyway."

Dropping the torn strips, he tied his handkerchief across nose and mouth, and ran into the dark and silent bedroom. He turned off the open jet, and raised the single window that gave upon the narrow air shaft.

Upon the bed lay the Glaive children in a row, arranged with care and order, the smallest near the foot, the largest near the scarred headboard. Ellen knelt before them, her stretched arms touching each one of the still bodies, her head fallen upon the child in the centre of that lifeless line; self-crucified, after what a Gethsemane, God alone could know and pity.

In a vain search for a living heart-beat, Brady bent over one small body after another; he lifted, at last, Ellen Glaive's stiffened hand and let it fall with a shrug. Then he turned to confront an intruder. Mrs. Maxwitz stood alone in the middle of the front room, braving the still deadly air. She beat her breast with clenched fists. Between each word of her lament the gas caught and choked her.

"Ach, dat loafer! Dat verdampster husban'! Id was him dat kill her! Das ist murder, I say id! I say id!"

"Hey, what d'yer mean, murder?" demanded the law's representative with suddenly sharpened interest.

The woman continued to stare at the cracked and blackened ceiling and cry her vengeance.

"Ach Gott! Vill you led 'im ged away mit id? He leave her, her husban' go vay! She no want dat hospitals geds her baby! Dose charities de childrens geds. Und for her, I ask id, vot? Again, I ask id—vot?"

"Aw, cut out that stuff!" The guardian of the public peace moved forward and faced the crowd, pushing through the door.

"He kill her! He kill de babies!" the woman wailed. Then with a louder shriek: "*Und me!* I didn't know, und I help 'im!" With a wild gesture of tragic grief, she ripped her thin, print wrapper from throat to hem. "Me—*Me*, id was, wat loan id her—a qvater!"





# THE DRAW-KEEPER

BY

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THE GRAY MASK—*Collier's Weekly*  
THE DESERT GIRL—*McClure's Magazine*  
THROUGH THE DARK—*Collier's Weekly*  
THE DOCTOR'S WIFE—*Collier's Weekly*



## VII

### THE DRAW-KEEPER

**T**HE railroad officials, since it was convenient, placed the blame on old Haley, yet they were more justly culpable themselves, for they should have relieved him long before the wreck. Moreover, he was mentally sound when he told his story to the division superintendent and begged him to explain its violations of human routine. Doubtless the superintendent understood, but he was a responsible servant of the road, and sympathy for the victims of one's own mistakes is not, unfortunately, an explosive virtue.

Haley had been on the drawbridge at Bull Bluff for more than twenty years. He had brought his wife to the swamp-pressed cabin beside the track. There his son had been born, primitively, for the fifteen miles to the nearest town, the scarcity of trains, and the lack of a wagon road had made it impossible to get a doctor through in time. After that they had continued contentedly even in the crowning loneliness of that place.

To make life bearable there was, of course, their own companionship, the magic of their child's progress,

and, daily, a few trains roaring by, as well as boats and log rafts, whose impatient whistling sent them to bend backs and strain muscles over the turn bar.

Eventually the steamboats were given a sinister meaning for them. When they had opened the draw and stood leaning against the supports, they would watch these busy craft glide through with misgivings. They would answer the greetings from pilot-house or forecastle with prophetic gestures that conveyed an impression of farewell.

This state of mind was forced on them tragically enough one night when the *Queen of the River* signalled the bridge for the last time. She was the largest boat they saw. She ran only in Winter, crowded each trip with tourists from the north whom she brought to admire and wonder at the desolate, tropical shores of this stream.

At her whistle that evening Haley and his wife ran from their cabin to the turn bar, unlocked the bridge, and began with desperate haste to swing the ponderous draw, for it seemed an honour to clear the channel for the *Queen*. They never failed to gape. She gave them a feeling of unworthiness, almost of shame, when her great searchlight picked them out and held them exposed to the populous, noisy decks. They experienced, too, a sense of unreality as her brilliant windows flashed by, and they caught glimpses of upholstery, mahogany, mirrors, and well-dressed men and women at unfamiliar pleasuring.

That night, Haley remembered, the captain leaned from the pilot-house, waved his gold-braided cap, and shouted:

"A little slow opening, Haley."

"Have her wide open for you to-morrow night, Cap," Haley called back.

The giant was through. The water, churned by her wheels, moaned and sobbed past the piers and among the pilings. Laughter from the decks fought against it for awhile, then died away.

Haley had frequently had this fancy of the water, had more than once spoken of it to his wife. He mentioned it to-night.

"Sounds like somebody crying."

His wife shivered, for the night air was cold.

Following their custom, they stood staring after the boat until she had swung for the bend, had exposed for a moment one radiant flank before gliding, swan-like, behind the trees.

"Sometimes wish I was on her, Tom," the woman muttered.

Haley laughed a little roughly.

"Not me. If we saw people to talk to we wouldn't know how to behave."

"They're happy though," she said, "those that ride on her."

"I wonder," he mused.

The bridge lights and the tiny gleam from their cabin were depressing after the glory which a moment ago had been beside them, within hand's reach. Si-

lently they swung the draw into place, locked it, and walked across the trestle.

Later, still wondering about those who sailed on the *Queen of the River*, Haley saw a pink reflection grow in the sky to the south. It puzzled him because he thought its area too limited for a forest fire. Yet there was no house for many miles in that direction. Consequently he went to bed satisfied that it could be nothing but burning trees and brushwood.

When a freight train came through the next morning he learned the undreamed of, the unbelievable. The majestic *Queen of the River* lay a blackened hulk on a shoal in one of the stream's widest stretches, and, what was harder to grasp, upholstery, mahogany, mirrors, and, alas, many, many well-dressed men and women would no longer be seen through her brilliant windows.

Haley took his opportunity between trains, and, leaving the draw to his wife and child, slipped down to the appalling ruin.

To hear of horrors is bad enough. To face them with one's own eyes is often demoralising. It was years before Haley could drive the things he saw there from his mind. This healing process was unquestionably retarded by his life in the lonely cabin at the end of the bridge. For a long time that sheltered his memory of the cataclysm. Each object in its single room appeared to have allied itself with some grim, tremendous detail.

At night on the draw it was worse.

"I told him I'd have her wide open when he came back," he often whispered to his wife. "He won't come back. She was too big and pretty and—and solid. It can't be."

And sometimes when he waited for a log raft to crawl through he would stamp his foot impatiently.

"I wish I'd never thought that about the water, crying, else I wish these tugboats wouldn't kick up such a fuss."

Or, through a habit of introspection acquired during his lonely life, he would reach out vaguely with breathless, unanswerable questions.

"She used to whistle up there by the bend just about this time of night—along about half-past ten. Remember? It echoed off the trees. It was fit to wake th—the dead. It got us out, and it frightened the birds. You could hear them moving through the woods. All that noise every night! Where's it gone now?—It's so still here—don't you listen for it? And the way those people used to laugh on deck! Remember that? They laughed louder than ever that time. What's come of all that laughing? The water cries. Hear it?—cries just the same. But there ain't any more laughing."

That was long past, and many other and more personal changes had intervened. Haley's wife had left the swamp-pressed cabin. This time, too, when it was the saving instead of the bringing of life, it had been impossible to get a doctor through the wilderness in

time. Haley's son was seventeen. While his father had clung to duty, he had stolen rides or walked the fifteen miles to town many times. Now he was ambitious to settle there and work. So it was on Haley that the loss of his wife fell with unconquerable regret. His hair and beard were grey. It was at this time that the trainmen began to call him Old Haley, yet he was scarcely forty years old.

He listened to his son's plans and watched his growing restlessness apparently without comprehension. When the boy announced his definite departure he acquiesced with indifference.

"The road will have to give me another hand," was all he said.

This, however, the road refused to do. The bridge was on a branch line. The business did not justify such extravagance. They figured for him the average number of times per month the draw was opened. He would not have believed it so few. The *Queen of the River* catastrophe, of course, had placed a curse on high-class passenger traffic. During the years since there had been no large boats. In addition that section was well cut out, so that log rafts were scarce now. Yet it seemed to him that his back and arms ached no less than before.

He spoke of the road's refusal to his son.

"They say I must manage with you. If I bother them again they'll throw me out and get some poor family who'll do the work."

"Don't ask," the boy said bluntly. "We'll say



nothing, and I'll go just the same. Think they'll kick if they find you're here most of the time alone? Nobody'll say a word. Bridge is only a nuisance to them anyway. Haven't raised your wages in a long time, have they? It would cost them more to put a family here than they're paying you. Meantime I'll do my best to make enough to keep you when you do leave the bridge."

There was no defence against this last argument. Besides, Haley couldn't forecast a life deprived of his small wage; and a conscious, final exodus from the cabin was inconceivable.

So it was arranged, and so Old Haley was left alone at Bull Bluff.

That evening, when he had swung the draw shut after the passage of a small freighter, he seemed for the first time fully to realise his new state. The filth of the passing boat's deck had aroused his contempt, and, from habit, with a comment on his lips he had turned to where his wife had always stood. Emptiness! And it rushed in upon him now how empty his life had become, for, since she had gone, the boy had stood in her place, had veiled that emptiness.

He straightened his back slowly and looked about him with the eyes of a newcomer. The sun had just set behind the swamp. The rapidity of its descent suggested a fall. The clouds bulging upward from the trees might have been steam rising from its extinction in the muddy water, the faint colours playing over them, the reflection of its expiring fires. It seemed

impossible the day should ever flame again after that immersion.

The river had an appearance of solidity. From bend to bend it was like highly polished steel. The thick swamp pushed to the water's edge on both shores, save where the railway embankment ran white and smooth from the trestle's ends. To the east the track stretched straight away, but to the west, beyond his cabin, it curved sharply off into the forest.

His eyes rested curiously on the cabin—the focus of his mature life. Its front was built against the embankment, but, so steep was that, it had been necessary to raise the rear of the little building above the swamp on high pilings. There was a window on each side. Over the door opening on the railroad hung a white sign with worn black letters: "Bull Bluff Draw-bridge."

He walked slowly back, gazing with a sense of sympathy at the huge, gaunt, moss-draped frames of the cypresses—those ultimate symbols of loneliness.

After twenty years he was alone at Bull Bluff, and he faced it with the same surprise and dismay. He asked himself, as he had asked in the beginning, how "bluff" had crept into the name of such a water-logged place. Only yesterday it had seemed familiar—home. Why had it suddenly assumed a strange and repellent air? He knew why. He walked on more slowly, with bowed head until he opened the door of the cabin and entered its shadows.

When he had lighted the lamp he prepared his sup-

per on the dwarfish stove. That task, too, had been spared him by his son. His clumsy efforts reminded him that everything—everything now depended on himself—not only his own necessities, but the necessities of the great outside world which each day trusted its swift messengers for a moment to his care. He must light and set the signal lamps on the draw. He must keep the mechanism well greased. Day or night, unaided, he must swing its great weight at the demands of traffic. This responsibility had been light when the future had cradled it. Now, grown to companionship with the present, its vast bulk for the moment crushed Haley. He began to brood upon it.

Later, after he had climbed into the bed, unnecessarily and pitifully large now, he recalled that there was no one with whom to share the anticipation of the unexpected, for the routine of railroad and river was often broken in upon without warning. So Haley lay awake most of the night, listening for a signal from train or boat, starting up more than once at the sudden, mournful cry of some nocturnal prowler in the swamp. And Haley's longing was not for his son. The boy's departure had been an incident in the day, but its train of consequences demanded the return of another figure, who had also gone ahead, but irrevocably. In his simple way he wondered if she, like his son, would try to make a home for him when he should have left the bridge forever.

The habit of insomnia grew. Many mornings he left the cabin, unsteady and half blind from lack of

sleep. Yet during the first month his vigilance was rewarded only once. That once, however, Haley was on the draw with time to spare, and he felt satisfied.

At the end of the month his son returned for a few hours. He swung down from the caboose of a freight train one night.

Haley was on the open draw, gazing with a stunned expression at the headlight of the locomotive. He did not see his son at first. Suddenly bending to the turn bar, he began running with bent back and taut muscles in a narrow circle while he closed the bridge.

As the locomotive grumbled by, gathering speed, the engineer glanced at Haley, who clung to the railing of his platform.

"Must have been a fast boat you let through, Haley, else you been dozing with the draw open."

Haley stiffened with an air of pride.

"Ever know me to do that?"

"Must say I haven't," the engineer called back.

Yet Haley had for the first time done something of the sort—he didn't know just what, but he realised he had made a mistake.

He stepped back to the ties with painful care. He walked unevenly from the draw and down the trestle. His head was bowed, his forehead wrinkled. He tried to retrace his actions during the last cloudy half hour.

"Ha—ay, pop!"

The voice startled him. He passed the back of his

hand over his eyes and peered ahead through the darkness.

"That you, son?"

The boy ran out on the trestle, took his arm, and led him back toward the cabin.

"Come on ninety-three, son?"

"Yes. What was the draw open for. I didn't see any boat. Listen!"

They paused for a moment.

"I don't hear anything but ninety-three. No boat been through here the last few minutes. Oughtn't to leave the draw open, pop. Some of the engineers might take it into their heads to make a fuss. Maybe you figured ninety-three would be late."

Haley didn't answer immediately. When they had reached the planking in front of the cabin he leaned against the wall and from the shadows looked at his son in the lighted doorway.

"Didn't you hear a boat whistle as you was coming through the woods?" he asked in a low, hesitant voice.

"Only whistle I heard was us blowing for the draw."

Haley passed the back of his hand across his eyes again. The fingers trembled.

"Seems you ought to've heard. I was just dozing off. I heard—woke me up—wasn't very loud—more like an echo. Course I couldn't take chances. I tumbled out and opened the draw and watched for her to come around the bend."

Haley's voice had more life as he repeated:

"Course I couldn't take any chances."

His son, before he spoke, filled and lighted his pipe. The match disclosed Haley's figure leaning against the cabin wall.

"And our whistle, pop?" the boy asked in a low tone.

"That's it," Haley said, his voice dead again. "I didn't hear ninety-three. Looked up, and there was her headlight blinding me from the other side of the channel. Now wasn't that curious, son?—Curious, wasn't it? Mind must have been set on that boat that didn't show up."

The boy entered the cabin. Haley followed him with an apprehensive air. He drew back timorously as the boy turned and faced him.

"Look at me, pop."

Haley fumbled with the collar of his shirt.

"Pop, you ain't well."

"Well enough."

"What's ailing you?"

"Not sleeping much. That's all. Kind of hanker after company at night on the draw. Now that's curious, ain't it?"

His son watched him closely for a moment.

"Don't blame you for getting lonely, but, whatever you do, don't come down sick."

"No fear—never been sick in my life."

The boy handed him a cigar.

"Brought you some of these."

Haley accepted it silently. He arose and crossed to the stove for a match. He walked, as he had come

down the trestle, with an unevenness that was almost a lurch. Once his hand went out quickly and grasped the back of a chair. He steadied himself, then, continuing, lighted his cigar. His son studied him, clearly puzzled.

"Pop, you ain't been drinking?"

The old man swung with a flash of anger.

"On duty! I've got a record. No liquor on this bridge."

But he knew what had prompted the question. He sat down at the table, leaned his head on his hand, let his shoulders droop, and smoked reflectively while his son waited. At last he glanced up and spoke with a perplexed manner.

"Not drink. Going around with the turn bar in circles when I open and shut the draw. Ever make you feel queer, son?"

The boy shook his head.

"Nor me," Haley went on, "'til just lately. Going around in circles—circles that way—Sometimes when I come back in here this little square room—ain't much bigger than twice the turn bar—goes round and round in circles, too, 'til I can't see the corners. Now that's curious, ain't it? Clears up by and by."

He resumed his smoking in silence. The boy said nothing more until the cigar was finished. Then he urged his father to go to bed.

"You sleep to-night without worrying about anything. I'll tend to the draw. You get it off your mind for once."

Haley was grateful. For the first time in many nights he removed all his clothing before climbing into the pitifully large bed.

His son lay on his old-time folding cot in the corner.

"Don't you fret, pop," he called across the darkness. "I'm not going to miss any tricks."

But even with this release Old Haley failed to find forgetfulness. Most of the night he lay listening. For what? He couldn't say, yet he lay awake and listened, and the emptiness at his side seemed listening, too.

His son left early in the morning on the up freight.

"I've got to jump her, pop," he said apologetically, "or I'll lose my job. Can't afford to do that now. You get more sleep and take some quinine. You'll be all right. I'll be back to see before long."

Haley, still in bed, pressed the boy's hand. When the rumble of the train had diminished to silence and the peace of the forest and the river was broken only by the breeze whispering in the hanging moss and the leaves, Haley raised his fingers slowly to his tired eyes. This time he found them wet. But, although his son's departure had brought the tears, it was not for the remoteness of the boy's return that he wept.

He sprang up impatiently and drew his clothes on. He stepped from the cabin. The sun had not yet vanquished the mist which hung above the water and wreathed among the trees, giving them an appearance of ghastliness. The chill in the air made him shake. He entered the cabin again and closed the door.



The trouble of which he had spoken to his son grew. Frequently after swinging the bridge he had to sit by the turn bar for some minutes before attempting the walk back across the trestle. At times the woods and the river circled about him so rapidly he could not find his cabin in the green, silver-shot confusion; could not tell which way to turn to leave the draw. He was grateful for the few revolutions it was necessary to take in the opposite direction in order to lock the bridge. But they were insufficient. His vertigo increased.

He began to resent the impatient signals from boats which sent him, forewarned, to this circular subversion of his little world. The jovial greetings of pilots and deck-hands became mockery. They angered. Supporting himself against the rail or the turn bar, he would stare morosely back without word or gesture.

Moreover his insomnia persisted, and during the nights he dwelt upon the fancied whistle that had sent him to open the draw uselessly the evening of his son's return. Always now he listened with a breathless expectancy. He listened until one night he started up at the same vague but imperative sound—the sound he had described to the boy as an echo.

He lay back. He determined he would not be deceived again. Yet the vague sound of that echo lingered in his brain. It seemed to beat against his ear drums, but from within.

Finally he drew on his boots and left the cabin. The

usual fog lay upon the water. There was no boat in sight. Still, normally, one whistling for the draw, would not yet have had time to round the bend. Haley hesitated. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other until the impulse to hurry to the bridge and open it became irresistible. He swung the draw, running with extraordinary haste in his little circle about the turn bar.

When the channel was clear Haley leaned dizzily against the rail—watching. The fog thickened. Birds in the swamp made slow, flapping noises, uttered sharp cries as they rose to higher branches.

He watched until he remembered ninety-three was due. He wouldn't be caught like that a second time. So he closed the bridge. As he clung, waiting for the world to solidify again, he turned sharply. He had received an impression of some presence in the fog at his side. But the fog was very thick. He could see nothing.

He repeated this experience at irregular but shortening intervals—heard the vague, formless whistle, neglected as long as he could its command, at last ran, conquered, to his futile task. Once when he staggered back to the cabin his eyes chanced on the clock above the stove. Its hand pointed to half-past ten. After that he glanced at the clock habitually on his return from these unrewarded labours. The hands invariably made the same angle.

Certain objects in the room unexpectedly recalled old associations which he had fancied forgotten. He re-

arranged these objects, even hid the smaller ones, but their appeal did not abate.

He wondered almost indifferently when his son would redeem his promise to see how he was getting on. To be sure, such a visit would be a relief from the only uniform companionship he knew—the birds and the unseen, unknown things that whispered always in the swamp.

His son returned after two weeks on a brilliant Sunday afternoon.

Haley sat on the planking in front of his cabin. His haggard eyes were fixed on the bend of the river. He shook hands with his son affectionately. In reply to the boy's questions he said he was well enough.

"Except for lack of sleep and things going round," he added. "Walk in and find you something to eat. I ain't coming. Good chance to get rid of the circles, sitting here in the sun."

He resumed his smoking placidly. Again he fixed his steady regard on the bend.

After the boy had obeyed he brought another chair and sat at his father's side, asking questions whose answers appeared to satisfy him.

With the setting of the sun and the growth of dusk, however, Haley became unquiet. He glanced frequently over his shoulder. Once or twice he started up to sink back again with a sigh.

"Ain't opening the draw any more by mistake?" his son asked.

Haley looked around for some moments. When he spoke he failed to answer the question.

"Remember the boat?"

"What boat, pop?"

"The boat that didn't come through that night."

The boy nodded.

"Wonder what that was?" Haley asked thoughtfully.

The evening deepened. The trees at the bend, to which the old man's eyes still turned, became a dim, shapeless bulk. Little by little the polish left the steel-like water. The water ceased to resemble steel. It assumed the likeness of a black veil strung from the forest, whose sombre masses it still reflected formlessly.

The old man stirred. He turned to his son. He spoke with wistfulness.

"There's a boat been trying to get around that bend—some time now."

His son started.

"A boat, pop?"

"Yes—for some time now—trying awful hard to get around that bend and through the draw. It—it can't quite make it."

He gulped.

"Ain't that curious now, son?"

And after a moment:

"I wonder if it will ever get around?"

Haley's voice fell to a whisper.

"If the draw wasn't open then!"

By and by he arose and yawned.

"I never kept them waiting much, did I, son? I'm sleepy to-night. Maybe if I went to bed knowing you was here, I might drop off tight."

He stepped inside, but he reappeared almost immediately and faced his son with an air of constraint.

"That's curious what I said about the boat, but don't think any more of that. That's all it is—curious."

He waited. His attitude was tense. At last he spoke with forced carelessness.

"You'll look after the bridge to-night?"

"Yes, pop. Don't you worry."

"All right," the old man answered, "only if you hear a whistle from the river be sure you get the draw open in time. I'd hate for the draw not to be open in time, son."

He re-entered the cabin and went to bed, but he slept little. The thought that his son might not hear obsessed him.

In the morning the boy was reluctant to go.

"It's too lonesome here for you, pop; but I can't stay. Wish I could. Stick it out a little longer, and I'll fix it so I can get you up to town."

The old man leaned in the doorway.

"I ain't so sure, son," he said slowly, "that I want to go up to town."

When he was alone he set about his work dreamily. The machinery had not been greased for some days, so he went over it with minute care, for he wanted the

bridge in perfect order, ready to swing quickly. Afterward he brought out a chair, and, taking his accustomed seat in front of the cabin, fixed his eyes on the bend.

His view was abruptly shut off in the middle of the afternoon. A shout brought him upright. A heavy freight locomotive was jarring violently by within four feet.

"Some sleeper, Old Haley!" the engineer called back.

Yet Haley knew he had been awake. His mind could not fathom the experience. Still sounding it uselessly, he opened the draw for a tow of logs at sunset.

"Hey!" a man called from the tug. "If you ain't careful, Haley, you'll flop into the river one of these days."

Haley slowly raised his hand in a gesture of anger. He did his best to hold the boat in his field of vision, but he was unsuccessful. It slipped before his eyes in recurrent and widening circles. His failure increased his anger. He shouted back into the green, revolving confusion:

"If you ain't careful, one of these days I won't turn the draw for you."

And from out the confusion the man's voice came back glibly.

"You'll be losing your job before you know it, Haley."

When the tow was gone Haley shook his head at

the memory of his outburst. His mind shrank from the man's prophecy. To lose his job after twenty years! It was longer than usual before he could steady himself for the walk across the trestle.

During his supper and afterward those words clung and troubled. When he was in bed he kept repeating:

"You got to get the draw open in time or you'll lose your job."

Unconsciously his mind reiterated the refrain while he listened, while the emptiness at his side listened with him.

It came at last—the vague, formless whistle, like an echo entering his brain. He sprang up. He drew on his boots, chanting consciously now:

"Haley, you got to get the draw open in time."

His power to combat the signal finally demolished, he ran out to the track. The fog lay white and thick on the water. The lights of the bridge were dim, unreal.

He stumbled along the ties to the trestle. He reached the draw. He placed the bar in its socket. He commenced to turn in his narrow circle with frantic haste. If she should round the bend to-night the channel must be open.

When his task was done he hung, breathless, across the bar, while the world, white this time, and torn with reds and greens from the lamps, stormed about him.

Abruptly the world became still. Without preparation he found himself looking straight through the end of the draw at the fog which rolled between him

and the bend. And in the white fog by the bend he thought something whiter grew and loomed, larger, nearer, in the soundless silence of the swamp and the river.

Exultation clutched at Haley's throat. His hand gripped the iron bar.

"She's making it," he whispered. "This trip she's making it, and the draw's open in time."

The scream of a whistle echoed through the forest.

"No need to whistle," he muttered. "Draw's wide."

He sprang to the side rail. He leaned over to watch the white shape grow. The intensity of his desire brought it swiftly, smoothly, gracefully nearer—to the end of the pilings.

He cursed the fog, for it blurred the lights. It veiled the outlines of the boat from beyond the bend.

The chalky prow divided the fog—rolled it far to either side, and the boat, its smallest line unmasked for his memory, slipped majestically into the draw.

There was no need to look for the black letters on the side. His hand tightened its grip on the damp railing. He was sure the letters were there, arresting in shape, forming four companionable yet desolate words—*Queen of the River*.

Higher, above the decks, he knew the captain leaned from the pilot-house window, waving his gold-braided cap.

"A little slow opening, Haley."



He did not dare look at the captain. His voice rose. It was like a sob.

"Have her wide open for you after this, cap."

Indistinctly he saw the captain wave his hand, but he would not look closer.

The white, graceful flank swept by. The cabin windows came opposite, and Haley stared once more through their remembered openings. But the fog had lingered in there. Or was it another vapour? It twisted about the upholstery, the mahogany, and the mirrors; and the well-dressed men and women he recalled at their unfamiliar pleasures were shadowed beyond definition.

He noticed now that the water did not moan and sob past the piers and among the pilings. Nor was there the accustomed laughter that had always fought that sound. But when the stern came abreast and he glanced up at the populous, silent deck, he saw the laughter there, and he shrank away. Yet he had known all along it must be like that.

Haley, following his invariable custom when the *Queen* went through, turned to his wife with a comment.

"Seems like the water ought to cry to-night, but it don't."

"Remember," she answered, "you never wanted to go on her?"

"Yes. See! She's clearing now."

"And remember I always said those were happy—those that rode on her?"

He nodded.

"Well——" she began.

But the *Queen* had cleared. He raised trembling fingers to his eyes. The lids were closed. He forced them open. The fog rolled again. The white night recommenced its incoherent revolutions. Now that his eyes were open he could no longer see his wife. He reached out for her with helpless, circular gestures. He thought he heard her reassuring voice from the fog.

A vast glare blinded him. The whistle shrieked in an agony of sound. Shouts burst at his ears. The turbulent world closed in and crushed him.

They found Haley on the draw. He had been struck by a piece of flying wreckage. They carried him to his cabin and placed him on the pitifully large bed. They did this, cursing and none too gently, for the locomotive and two freight cars of ninety-three lay in the channel. Fortunately the engineer and the fireman had jumped in time, so that, except for the old draw-keeper, no one had been hurt. It would, however, cost the road a pretty penny to raise the submerged equipment and clear the channel. Therefore, some one must be blamed.

The engineer could testify that Haley had failed to answer his signal. He bolstered this with the assertion that his brakes had failed to hold. There was no reason for the draw to be open. Where was there any boat? So Haley was chosen for the sacrifice.

The division superintendent hurried down on a special engine. When he entered the cabin Haley opened his eyes. He told the superintendent his story, expecting comprehension; confident, one would have thought, of some explanation from so superior a fellow mortal. The superintendent could, doubtless, have satisfied him, but he wasn't ripe for the sacrifice himself.

"Can't have nightmares," he said a little hoarsely, "unless you're asleep. Asleep on your job, Haley! Might's well own up."

But Haley flung his arm over the emptiness at his side, smiled, and said nothing more.



# THE RAZOR OF PEDRO DUTEL

BY

RICHARD MATTHEWS HALLET

AUTHOR OF

MAKING PORT—*Every Week*

ARCHAEOLOGY FOR AMATEURS—*Atlantic Monthly*

THE FAMILY TREE—*Everybody's Magazine*

THE HOUSE OF CRAIGENSIDE—*Saturday Evening Post*

The history of this manuscript is somewhat like that of the Wandering Jew. It has been sent more often to magazines than any story we know of. Frequently, after rejecting it, editors have had the story returned for further consideration; one editor read it four times, finally refusing it with regret. That this story shows Mr. Hallet at his best is the opinion of several editors who did not publish the story solely on account of its "unhappy" theme. Were they mistaken? We leave the question to the readers of this volume with but small fear of their answer.

F. S. G.

## VIII

### THE RAZOR OF PEDRO DUTEL

**A**T the time the man, Pedro Dutel, discovered that my partner, Frank Hyde, was a competent barber, we were cracking granite on top of a blazing mountain, in whose purple shadow Dutel had built his house, close by the river-bed. I can still feel the cold air of that wide, shining hall of his, the yield of those wicker chairs to my sore ribs; I can still see the great prospect of plain and mountain to the north, as we sat, all three of us, on the veranda. And I can still see my partner, pausing, with the razor held away from the chin of our host, to glance somewhat wistfully at the river.

“You think it will rise?”

“It has a frog in its throat,” murmured Dutel, again submitting his check to that resplendent leaf of steel which stroked the skin lightly as a feather fallen from the wings of sleep.

Our boat was moored just around the bend; but although we knew that our host, in this suave opinion of his, had an eye to his shaves, we knew also, that somewhere back among those dim, round-shouldered mountains lay a sack of rain. Yet the river, only half asleep in its bed, enticed, haunted us with its

many-voiced dream-tale of the south, lying under twilight haze, like a mistress too languorous to rise, but willing to be won. It lay still, with scarcely a ripple, between its mysteriously figured walls of half-baked clay.

"It is too early to pick grapes there," Dutel let fall, waving his arm southward.

"I and Dick have got money," said old Frank. He wiped the razor on a clean towel, and added: "We have heard about a lady a day's run down the creek. And we are drawn that way. We are ladies' men."

At these words our immaculate Dutel came upright in his chair with a light in his dark eyes.

"Ah, you have heard," he said. "The wife of Amberg. My friends, yes, a devoted lady. But it is a bad family."

Lying back in his long chair, with eyes half shut again, he burst into the liquid speech characteristic of him. Amberg, he said, was a queer man, certainly a queer man, coming of a bad family, one of these bad families made bad by solitude and hard luck. Mad, poor devils, rather than bad. Their badness had a necessary quality in it, like the inexorable processes of indifferent nature. These people were numbed by their sequestering fate, indifferent to toil, as to the mournful fact of life itself, conducted in the thick of an unforgiving wilderness. They struck as the blind lightning strikes, from the pressure of invisible tormenting forces.

For his part, Pedro Dutel knew nothing authentic



of Amberg; and in the bush one never inquired. Never inquired. One assumed, one understood. Nevertheless, it was said that Amberg had brought his wife from the towns, from Melbourne probably, where she had been a bar-maid. He had retreated here to discuss her, like a dog with a bone.

But rumours here were of little account. Men came and went, shadows, lean brown shadows, shepherding spectral sheep, or knocking white bones together to startle rabbits from under cover. They were disappointed men, these selectors; men driven out of the fat, fertile margins by the shouldering in of capital, money from home in vast blocks. They were dour spirits driven to conceal from all but God the exasperating fact of their continuing poverty. Yes, and they cursed God as well, whose awful benediction, cast upon them from the starry softness of those deep skies, they could neither fathom nor escape. This ironic and velvety splendour could only plunge them deeper into blasphemy.

"They work to no purpose," said our host Dutel.

Few men, he said, would have, in the face of such incredible obstacles, this dark spirit of patience with the land, this iron courage, standing up unmoved and scornful of results out of a tangle of roots: of roots planted in a baked land fallen into cracks and strewn with bones, with stumps, innumerable stumps. A day's work to a stump.

Pedro Dutel, over whose dark face had flashed an appearance of grim mirth, warned us that there were

stumps now on his own estate, which would account for a dozen bad families. Land-clearing machinery was known to exist, but it was not at the beck of these selectors.

“They worry them out.”

In an interval between these worryings Amberg had brought into this back-block a wife who could be called—yes, a beautiful woman. Mr. Dutel had once been fortified in his own soul by a sight of her at the edge of his estate. A sulky and magnificent figure of a woman, tall as the fabled goose, with a neck as white, after all these suns. A bar-maid, had he said?

He rubbed his hands, as if this description had set her before him in a new light; as if he half wondered why he had sat here all this time, idle, with that neighbour down the river.

But this miracle of a wife had given an odd turn to Amberg's badness. He was said to be jealous, insanely jealous; and this jealousy had as good as buried her in that solitude. No one would go near the place. Amberg was a very powerful fellow, and people feared some outburst of his jealousy.

Dutel stopped speaking, and in the silence, night fell, swift as a net over the fluttering wings of day. That round fragment of a granite mountain hung over us, like the black bag out of which night had been poured since time began. A servant brought a candle to the elbow of our host, who pouted his lips to the flame, lighting a cigarette.

Yes, there seemed to be no doubt that the man Am-

berg was jealous of his wife. He had as good as told him, Dutel, to keep away, at the same time that he had accepted a bottle of very good whiskey at his hands.

The eyes of our host beamed. Could we sympathise with her? She was alone, cut off from her kind; destined to confound nobody with a display of that bewildering beauty.

"A beautiful woman is nobody's possession," said our host smoothly. "She is reflected into many hearts, as the sun shines on many waters."

It was beyond analysis; a strange thing. Showing perhaps that to meet with a sane mind the oppressive immensity of all this—here he waved his arm at the bush—the something unmoved, impassive; men must live together, they must run the risk of their wives' affections being stolen away. That was the price. Of what use the retaining of a wife, however beautiful, at the cost of reason, at the cost of life itself?

"She will kill him ultimately, of course," said Pedro Dutel.

Our host exerted himself cheerfully in the rôle of philosopher. His pleasant voice, speaking without rancour, was strangely at odds with the dark magnificence, or even majesty of his face, with its full lips, its bold eyes, in the corners of which seemed to lie shadows of rapacious dreams. In his rumpled suit of yellow linen, he seemed immense of body, as an ape; and his arm hung by his side like an ape's. When he moved it, as in a gesture, there was an inclusive crook in it; he would hold the hand outstretched, until the

smoke from his cigarette settled into a vague spire, a tiny motionless column, delicately tremulous at the top, as if magically issuing into fragrant wreaths, evoked to fall upon the head of this reasonable man with war-like eyes. An immense chain of wrought gold extended along the hollow under his ribs, a chain of gold glittering in the blue night, like some mute and all-powerful bond between the man and his philosophy. He was rich, so we had heard; this station of his was an experiment, a mere nothing, outlying here as if to give him a chance to air his thoughts. Comfortable people, as old Frank had said, were in a position to say dog-goned comfortable things.

Something in all this had silenced even my partner's tongue; but now he said:

"This here Amberg has been breaking stone up there, along with I and Dick. She had all her chanct then."

Dutel's eye flashed a sudden special intelligence at him. Uttering the single word "Yes," he crushed out his cigarette in the candlestick; and stood listening profoundly, as if attuning himself to the night, to the music of the spheres. Yawning, he stretched his thick arms out, perhaps in a prayer for the freedom of the earth. The yellow light of the candle, streaming upward against his swarthy face, which was slightly pitted, gave it the strength of its dark hollows.

"He stopped in here to-night, on the way to his selection," he said slowly after a time. "He has worked enough. I let him have what he wanted."

Dutel spoke contemptuously, as of an animal he had indulged; and shortly after we turned in. We were sleeping in an abandoned dairy; sleeping hard, too, desperately hard, with the ring of that healthy granite in our ears; and our very heart shaken by the repeated impact of mauls, swung in racking half-circles.

In the morning we felt actually sodden; our hands were cracked; the ribs seemed wrenched away from the spine. As it was, we had stayed longer than most navvies would have found it convenient. We were not professional rock-men; and we had had enough.

Dutel, with a regretful sigh, that arched his vast chest, said at breakfast:

"You are going, then?"

"We reckon so."

"And down the river?"

"We will take tea of that lady of yourn."

Dutel hesitated, and suddenly brought out of his pocket a razor, not the one which Frank had used in shaving him. This was a larger blade, held between two slats of yellow ivory, inlaid with silver points. The name of our host was delicately painted in black on one of these slips of ivory. This instrument had a look at once of murder, antiquity and art.

"It is a good piece of steel, but it needs to be honed," he said. "Our friend Amberg has a blue-stone which will do the business. I gave it to him, and afterward lost mine."

Looking at us soberly he added in a quiet tone:

"That razor has a history. It has cut many

throats. It is yours! I imagine it will sweat blood on warm nights."

As he expected, my partner received this hint with a consummate twinkle of appreciation. Hah. It would sweat blood. He pondered the hideous and pleasing attribute, sitting cross-legged in the boat, which creaked over the imperceptible current. Do you think this propensity of a slip of steel to sweat blood was nothing to a man of imagination? It was in all, I tell you. He believed it. That razor was dear and necessary to his heart. Its sudden presentation had deflected him from an original intention of steering clear of Amberg's selection altogether. The chance of a bluestone overbore the risk that might be run by breaking the lady's seclusion. Dutel had certainly made us a careful estimate of her. I seemed to see again the dark figure of our host, just as he stood on the bank above us, in loose linen, with a friendly and speculative gleam in his fierce eyes, which possessed, appropriated, whatever they fell on.

Although we were to be a day's journey by the river, it was nevertheless true that the selector Amberg's land adjoined Dutel's estate.

The river ran five miles to the road's one.

Toward night, the river turned, bringing our backs to the sun.

"Another one of them red-roaring oxbows," said my partner. "This here river is limp enough for a stock whip."

The sun was just over the trees, a forest of tea-

trees on the left, where we came abreast of Amberg's selection. There was a shack of stringy bark on the river-bank, but seeing a flash of a roof inland, we turned our steps at once that way. It was a sad place, a gloomy prospect for a couple of swagmen. Lying all about on the hot turf were the charred and rifled trunks of ringed gums, yawning, with black mouths, like giant overturned mortars. They were invested with rabbits, and showed here and there, through cracks, tufts of fur.

In the short grass white bones glimmered in links and crosses and odd broken patterns of a past mortality. The bush, crowding this withered patch, shone sallow green, dense and mute. The sun behind us hung over the tea-trees like a hot copper boiler. There was not a sound.

The house was blind-ended, unkempt, smeared with whitewash. Against the rear of it hung, pegged out, the skins of half a dozen black snakes, with beautiful crimson bellies. We eyed our bare feet doubtfully, but turned the corner of the house.

The wife of Amberg, whom the magic of Dutel's tongue had touched already, was on the porch, washing her bare arms in a tin basin. We were at first shocked to see those arms brilliantly sprayed with blood above the elbow, until we saw just beyond her, the bodies of three opened sheep hanging from the roof of the porch by loops of harness. They were like glittering red caverns; her extraordinary brooding face seemed pale as death against them.

She became aware of us as she was drying her arms, and said calmly, without the least start or confusion :

“ Are you travelling from Sydney? ”

“ That same port, ma'am.”

We unconsciously drew together in our wonder at the flashing perfection of this creature whom the bush had swallowed up. Not all the cunning of Dutel's tongue could have invested her with half her charm of the wild. There was something dream-like and smooth in her reception of us. In a calm voice she told us there was water in the dam. She would lay out mutton for us. Tea. Did we care for tea?

Her eyes were blue as a tropical sea, a blue too deep for any sun to fade. They swam by us, they were fixed on middle distance, conveying, through their unwinking regard, the terrifying stillness in that woman's soul. For days, for years, it may be, she had given ear to a whole countryside. It seemed to us as if she had confused our voices with the voices of the bush, which had for so long held her in its smothering trap. Was she mad?

If so, she had taken the tone of her unreason from that universal hush, which was like wool in the ears. She gave the whole vicinity, merging as it was in night, a touch of dream, the rare beauty and pathetically fleeting emotion of a dream. She stood before us, half remembered, or like something we had been destined to see. In the limp droop of those magnificent arms, still moist, glowing pink in the face of a rayless sun, there was something unreserved and ab-



stracted. She was listening, eternally listening. Her very movements were lingering, stealthy, as if ever so light a noise might intercept some scarcely audible message.

She went into the house, gliding like the ghost of some bright substance.

In filling our basin with fresh water from the dam, we stumbled upon a bit of wire fencing, sunk into the ground as the preliminary to a wheat field. There was no wheat, but caught in one of the lower meshes of the wire was a small, grey lizard, dead many moons, its mouth of yellow satin wide open, minutely horrifying.

"King Dick," said my partner, stopping short, "that little reptile has starved to death. It wedged itself in there and——"

He looked back at that silent house with the three disembowelled sheep hanging from its roof.

"This is a dead-end of a place," he muttered. "Where is Amberg, I wonder?"

We saw no trace of him; and yet something in her attitude proclaimed his presence, the haunting presence of a fourth person throwing his shadow across that place.

A glance sufficed to reveal that he was not in the house itself. An inner room, not quite dark, contained only a rumpled bed, and a chair on the seat of which was stuck a bit of melted candle. The ceiling over us consisted of two bulging folds of burlap with a black split in the centre, leading into the gloom of rafters.

As with all these back-block hovels, the chimney was the main thing, a huge maw, in whose blackness hung a round kettle by six or seven sooty links. A narrow door stood in the wall to the left of this chimney.

"Have you lived long in these parts, ma'am?" asked Frank. His voice was thick.

"Four years," she said.

She walked past us to the chimney, and her bare feet made less noise on the red dirt than the feet of the geese.

"Awful quiet," he rumbled over his mutton. "Awful quiet here."

"Yes," she said. She seemed a little fluttered as if meditating some impulsive move from the gloom of the chimney. Her hands were softly crossed at her throat; she swung poised, as if she might have taken flight. And all the time we felt the unconscious power of some other personality lurking in that rapid dusk.

"I and King Dick was working with your husband up at Bald Top," Frank went on. This forbearance of hers to produce a husband had worked a nameless uneasiness in him. He felt that the presence of this man, even with his explosive instinct of jealousy, would relieve a situation already growing tense.

In answer she only dropped her eyelids, and leaned back against the chimney.

"Has he—has he showed up?" My partner insisted on accounting for this husband.

And these words were sufficient, for she made a gesture toward the shack by the river's edge, and in

a deep ringing tone, which for the first time rendered the music in her voice, she cried:

"He is out there. Drunk."

That, then, was what he had wanted of Dutel; something with which to combat the solitude, or the tearing insistence of this jealousy, provoked in him simply by the appalling beauty of a woman whom he had dared to put beyond the approaches of men, only to find that she turned a deaf ear to him as well. He may have felt himself the desperate illusoriness of that beauty. She was no more than a rebellious wraith, shimmering in the midst of this forlorn clearing.

"He came back in drink," she whispered. "Pig."

"Doggone his measly hide," said old Frank in hollow tones. "That is no way to treat a lady, ma'am."

He stood up, scratching his chin.

Suddenly her bosom heaved, she seemed to be let loose in redoubled beauty from that shadowy chimney corner; and her fiery blue eyes were fixed resolutely on my partner's apprehensive face. Yes, it was so they had come at him in the past. Her shoulders narrowed until little soft ridges of pliant muscle rose over them at the neck. Her few whispered words hissed in our ears like arrows.

"You have a boat. Take me. Take me away. O, dear God, take me to the town."

Imperious and adroit, she flung out both arms to my partner as if to melt him within the full circle of them, while she overwhelmed him with the mad urgency of her astonishing eyes. She coaxed him with

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the sudden unreserve of a child, sinking slowly to her knees, letting fall her head, backward, to display the longest line of her throat.

"The river may rise," she whispered passionately, "but what of that? I hope he may die in there. He will never know—need never know. Come—be quick."

She mumbled disjointed words, sobbing, with her arms laid across his knee. She could assume no position that had not a strong beauty, a persuading charm of wildness. Her leg, bare to knee, lay on the earthen floor in a thick shadow which was rising all round as night fell. Rapt and astonished, we gazed down at her prone body. Our eyes met, for one second. We looked different ways, not able to speak, or even think in terms of solid reason. We stared at that magnificent goose, coming weightily out of the chimney corner. Its undiscerning gravity gave it a singular look of command in the midst of this madness. The pallor of its neck was not more striking than that of hers against the curling tendrils of tawny hair into which the sun, falling through a chink in the western wall of the hut, struck uncertain fire.

We remained as if turned to stone, striving for some adequate sign, some word to utter, strong and yet civil, something that would detach us, once and for all, from this woman. The moment called for discretion, almost for a kind of understanding tenderness. We were wordless men.

Clearing his throat old Frank manages to eject the single word, "Lonesome," crouching over her, massive

and sorrowful. For a moment he looked down in amazement, as if some bright weapon had pierced his heart already. With a vague stroking gesture of his hand toward her hair, he mumbled:

"Turn in. You will feel different about this in the morning."

"Then you will not take me?" she cried fiercely.

"No, ma'am," said my partner. He began to be fierce too. An immense resolution was there, in the cant of his nose. He was being asked to run away with another man's wife and by the wife herself. No, sir, he had a proper regard for property in wives. It was not the same thing, at all, as if he had asked her to run away.

"Nobody will take me," she said with deep bitterness. "Are you going to leave me? Will you leave me alone here? What is my life to him?"

"You have got a man," said old Frank dubiously. Men had got drunk in his experience, without parting from their wives.

In this confusion he went fumbling in his pockets, and drew out the razor Pedro Dutel had given him. The last rays of the sun, coming through a knot-hole, sparkled faintly on its silver points, and clearly illuminated the name, Pedro Dutel, which he read intently, holding the razor still. As if meaning to soothe her, he said:

"Now, there is a razor that sweats blood. Yes, ma'am, it has cut so many throats it will sweat blood on warm nights. It was given I and Dick by a duke."

She leaned forward, half-forgetful of the plea she had been making, her lips parted. And then the red spot of sun fled, and darkness fell, like the black shadow of a squall, blotting out the expression of her face.

"Have you got a bluestone," he inquired, trying little by little to turn the talk into a safe channel. I heard him lay the razor on the table with a deliberate click, like a signal; and then the dull voice of the girl, which had a peculiar flatness except when she exerted it strongly:

"I will see," she said.

Old Frank, noiseless in bare feet, joined me in the doorway, and we felt rather than saw her rise from her crouching position, and pass through the door by the chimney. We looked out into the night.

The silence surrounding that unlucky place was so great that you could have heard the stars knocking together in the sky. Through the door, the trunks of the dead gums rose glimmering, in groups, festooned by tangled ribbons of bark. They made strange shapes of sorrow, like leaning crosses, age-encrusted monoliths. In their scarred and bone-like rounds, they suggested all kinds of livid terrors—terrors of madness. A neighbourhood like that will very quickly take the tinge of a sick brain.

"We will mosey out of here, to-night," muttered my partner.

There was not a trace of wind or sound. There seemed literally nothing between us and high heaven

to dim the burning scrutiny of those southern stars which, little by little, dissolved the brown of dusk into an incredible solution of crystal blue, rayed by fixed lights. The dark line of the bush haunted us. It was as if we had been shut in on some black bottom, alone with one pitiful girl, through whose mad eyes we were receiving this odd distortion of the landscape. We abhorred the earth we stood on, swung there in that illusory cold round of space, so devilishly pierced by sharp stars. I tell you, we were baffled by the wonder of that inconsiderate illumination, which shone over this horror so deadly wide on that deep round of velvet.

We were roused from this ghastly reverie by a creak of the door by the chimney. At the same time we heard the soft thud of that girl's feet. She dropped something on the now invisible table, panting, and sprang back forcibly.

"Holy Mackinaw," said Frank.

He took several steps into the room, and banged into the table. As his hand slid across that surface, it touched the razor he had laid there. The blade was open, and he picked it up.

"King Dick," he whispered, "it's wet. The dog-goned thing is wet!"

He had slapped it against the palm of his hand.

"Light a match," he said.

I lit one. Under the steadily burning flame, we saw a broad smear of blood across the palm of his hand.

"You've cut it," I said hoarsely.

He plunged his fist in the bucket of water under the table. We lit another match and stared again. There was no sign of a cut.

And then that girl came between us, fierce, hoarse-breathing. Her foot fell on mine, giving me the sense of that solid body, quivering all over from the receding impulse of an abhorrent crime. That warm dusty sole, like living velvet, horrified me, and I thrust her back. Suddenly she laughed, not a laugh that can be talked about, a banshee scream, torn out of her by the powers of black silence, of those twin brooding infinities of sky and bush.

"It—has—sweat—blood," she stated then. The devil had touched her with his own humour.

For half a second I believe old Frank actually considered the astounding possibility. It had become part of his life to believe that lurid myth. Recovering his reason, he seized the girl by her shoulders and swayed her back and forth.

"What have you done now?" he cried hoarsely. He got no answer; but in struggling she brought down the fishpoles out of their corner. We heard their tips rip across the sagging burlap and immediately there came several distinct, horrible raps on the beaten dirt, the noise of plump things falling.

"Let go!" Her voice was smothered.

Directly, something cold and sinuous touched my ankle in the blackness. That burlap had been alive.

I stood bolt upright, frozen, without words to voice my horror. By the grotesque, statue-like stillness



which had overtaken the body of my partner, I knew that one of the coiling things had touched his own flesh as well. He dropped his arms, or rather lowered them with extreme slowness. The faintest blue light possible shone through the door, and after an appalling interval, we crept toward it, sliding our feet forward by inchmeal, never raising them from the dirt.

Standing in the door we looked back, heavily and strangely; and again I tell you that mocking blackness held the twisted shapes of dreams. We heard her breathe, hard and fast, as if she had been running after us, full tilt. We saw her arms held out to us, as if fixed in a despairing appeal.

"You had nested them snakes!" old Frank muttered.

A cold chill swarmed up my spine. Was it so that she had safeguarded her appeal?

Suddenly our one raging desire was to withdraw from that house. That we should drag her to some remote justice of men, dealt her by a fellow whose life had not indurated him to making a choice of evils, this thought never came to us. We were half-glad she had killed that man who had buried her alive. But at the same time—strange fact—the woman had become a virulent poison to us. With a shudder I recalled her warm foot crushed against mine, the hot breath shrieking out of her. She had the self-sufficiency, then, of an ancient fury. We became accessories after the fact, and our one thought was to rid her of the fatal

menace of our testimony. Without us nothing would be proved; for months, it might be, nothing would be known. The words of Dutel reverberated in my head; that when they struck, out here, it was like the inexorable process of indifferent nature. Equally with love, or with the softest tenderness, this violent death had the sanction of the stars. What had he called them? The inviolate stars. We found ourselves going toward the river: fast.

Heavy clouds had obscured all stars in the north; rain hung about; and we heard the voice of the river, hoarse, menacing. It was getting ready to clear itself of the frog in its throat.

We spoke no words. Plunging down the bank—a runway of hot slime—we made no question of the profound importance of getting beyond the sphere of that malign beauty, whatever the cost, on the instant. She had shown us, in one fearful glimpse, how the logic of the dead wild ended the combat of souls.

We jumped into the boat, and my partner stroked her into the stream, with a convulsive movement of his arms. When we were well on the current, a faint crackling above caused us to lift our eyes.

“Holy old crow!” he cried despairingly.

That indomitable woman stood there above us, faintly illuminated by the starshine. A rising wind shook her skirts, making the rigid determination of her body more conspicuous. With the strength of a strong man, she had raised on end one of those rifled gum-trees, a leprous trunk with a hideous bell-mouth. She

had torn her dress; there was a dark line as of blood, on her bare shoulder, and the arm joining it was white and massive,—the arm of an Amazon, broad with the strain of lifting.

My thick brain began to understand, in flashes of amazed calculation, that she meant to dash us in pieces. We were being whirled by the current directly under that part of the bank where she hung poised. This maenadic spirit, black as an iron maiden, except for a gleam of light on her shoulders, wrestling with that tree trunk like some woman Cyclops, blindly bent on hurling us to destruction. Fascinated, we beheld the tree rise, with her arms solid under it as bars. She would never fail——

The boat could not be stopped; its flat bottom took no purchase on the current: but the whole business was over in a second, during which we saw that great tree slide over the clay bank with the sluggish and formidable ease of a ship launching. It fell short by two feet!

We had no time to be grateful for that mercy of chance. We were beset with watery terrors now. The river was suddenly rising in its bed and shrieking, like a man struggling with a nightmare. The stump she had hurled rose after us, gleaming and twirling, its roots rising like Medusa's locks. I heard my partner roar out to me to capture that tree. It was fairly dogging us, rolling over and over, seeming to nose the stern of the boat lovingly. I thrust it ahead. Handing me the paddle, my partner knelt, and lashed

the thing to the side, the heavy end projecting, for a ram.

Then we fled on the current, through a night that had no end. We hardly spoke to one another; but with each moment, our satisfaction increased to think of the distance we were putting between us and that uncompromising woman. All or nothing. She had not been grateful to us for simply running away.

When day came we felt we had come into a new land, which had only a soothing ignorance of the night's work. That was like a dream. The razor might have sweat blood, for all we knew now. We were well out of it at least. Miles away. A good thirty miles away, at the rate the current had driven us. The river-bed was already half full, and sending down to us odd lots from the back-country: rabbits, submerged sheep, capsized crows and cockatoos.

All these things we made out through a thick mist, almost a fog, which had blown in from the coast. I speared at them with the paddle, thinking to improve the state of my mind by a little activity of that sort. I was an accessory, you understand; an accessory after the fact.

At length old Frank grunted at me from his position forward, where he had been opening a mess of fresh water clams. In a moment he raised the burlap to let me look through the cabin.

"King Dick," he said, "they is a tarnation crew of rabbits in that log."

He spoke jocularly; and then, shifting his eyes,

fixed them on two dragged tufts of some substance like fur. These tufts protruded through a crack in our ram, which the continual battering of the night had widened.

"Yes, rabbits," he continued, in a ghastly voice. The impossible twinkle died out of his eye.

"What would you say if we let that log go about its business, partner?"

"Let it go, in God's name."

I could not drag myself from contemplation of those two iron grey tufts. I saw his fingers stumble among the lashings, I caught a glimmer from his sick eyes as they rolled in his head with aversion to that task. His hands hung over the reluctant knots, gleaming.

As he crouched, I made a turn of the river with a broad sweep of the paddle; and at once I had occasion to shout to him:

"Hold on."

Directly in our path, stretching fatally across the narrow waterway was the trunk of a huge gum, thick and straight as the body of a python. The water rushed against it; poured over it. That log had a look of something alive, stubborn, reptilian. The river here began to run rapidly, as its bed tilted downward. With the momentum gathered by our ram, we surged forward unavoidably.

"Leave it—to take up the shock," I howled. He desisted doubtfully, watching our terrific advance against that barricading gum. I was just able, by

sinking the paddle deep, to maintain a head-on course, the boat shaking like a jelly under the strain.

Old Frank, looking at our ram, said twice, with horrible doubtfulness: "It will split."

He was undeniably right. When that great bell-mouthed log, rotten through and through, came against the submerged gum, the impact threw us forward on our faces. But nothing could prevent our seeing that log open, like a brand in the heart of a fire, disclosing the body of the man Amberg dressed in black leather, as we had last seen him. He looked like a shrivelled beetle. We had only time to see his eyes, and the two diabolical tufts of his forked beard, when with the evenness of some ceremony, like a baptism, he plunged under the log. It was in vain that we watched for him to reappear.

After a while we became convinced that we had better land. On high ground we stamped our feet, and breathed the gratifying strangeness of that countryside. It was like all we had seen, except that we saw it now subdued or etherealised, softened by this unusual mist. We swung inland like two madmen. Perhaps we fancied we were going to arrange something, to take the edge off the casualness of that death. I think we wanted to make patent and formal acknowledgment to men that, after all, it was a man that had died, whatever his faults. Not a beetle. Not a black beetle.

We took our way over a random scattering of skeletons, ribs, hoofs, dung. The continual glare of these bleached bones, eloquent of death, seemed to work

a mocking corruption of our own bodies. We remembered that living hearts had only now hung in those peculiar spaces, had throbbed, stopped, rotted, blown away, while the stars shone—these inviolate stars—and the bush gave no sign. Our lives hung upon a thread, transient as a spark. We breathed thickly; while the spongy ground sent up hot little puffs of dust at our heels.

“There’s a shack,” said my partner.

It loomed close upon us in the mist, a house like all the other houses of the bush. And yet, happening to glance down at the ground, I saw that this was not precisely as other houses. I cried hoarsely to my partner to look down.

We were gaping into the yellow mouth of that dead lizard caught in his wire mesh!

I tell you, I felt then as if we were the centre of a mad vortex, at the place where infinities meet. This recurrence of the lizard was exasperating and fiendishly ill-timed, like the bizarre duplication in the train of nightmares. Choked with a feeling like wrath, as if this dead reptile had contrived to put himself maliciously in my way again, I glared down—and then my partner with a low oath lifted his bare heel and ground that mummified little atom deep into the scaly soil.

“The river’s turned,” he mumbled. “Drattd ox-bow.”

We were back again!

As if to force us to look at last into the secret heart

of the bush, the river had turned on itself and reconveyed us to that accursed spot.

We stared ahead, and as the mist slowly lifted we saw the house more plainly; and the three gutted sheep, still hanging red and cavernous from the porch.

We came upon the house, rocking from side to side, with discreet and noiseless steps, as if our lives depended upon utter stealth. And as we reached the narrow door at the side of the chimney—which stood open a little way; we heard a voice speaking in strong and liquid tones. It was Dutel.

When he heard the thud of our bare heels, and saw us standing in the doorway, he looked up pleasantly. Amberg's wife had flung herself across his knees, and with one ape-like arm extended, he toyed with her hair, raising and letting it fall musingly. And in his warlike eyes was reared the full flame of that remote spark which had kindled there as he told us in gentle tones that a beautiful woman belongs to no man. How had he said it? "The sun shines on many waters."

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, still in his pleasant voice, "I see you have returned for your razor."



# KNUTE ERICSON'S CELEBRATION

BY

ROBERT ALEXANDER WASON

AUTHOR OF

RAJAH—*Metropolitan Magazine*

BABE RANDOLPH'S TURNING POINT—*McClure's  
Magazine*

CUPID—*Everybody's Magazine*

THE TEST—*Every Week*

The manuscript of this story was age-tinted and worn from many journeys to magazines. After it had been secured for this collection the editor spoke of the tale to the head reader of one of our most important periodicals. "What's it about?" We began to outline the plot. "Oh, that story!" he interrupted; "it is three years since I first saw it but I remember it from start to finish. I begged my people to publish the yarn but they considered it too strong for the public."

F. S. G.

## IX

### KNUTE ERICSON'S CELEBRATION

**H**E was a big man with blue eyes—not china-blue, not baby-blue, but that peculiar blue which changes to steel or to green with the subtle flicker of hidden things, the eyes of the mystic—the eyes which really do see visions, in a crystal globe; or in the sunset, the misty moonlight, or the luring vistas of an open fire.

And his hair was straight and tawny, though it flowed in rolling waves across his large head and sometimes tumbled upon his massive brow like rock-tossed spume. His jaw was strong with square chin, yet standing out free and clean from the corded column of his throat like the jaw of a fighting terrier. His lips were full enough to indicate a healthy animal-nature but having none of that flabby looseness which denotes a sluggish intellect. He was a large man and very powerful.

Knute Ericson was the name of him and he was a rover. Companions he picked up as he felt the need of them, but friends he had none, for he was a foreigner to the world of to-day, and his ways were as strange to those he met as were their motives to him. When

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he sailed he was much given to standing in the bow of the vessel and gazing ahead into the tangled mess of the waves, humming weird tunes as the storm waxed stronger and the Viking blood of him harked back to the leapings of a shield-hung galley—blood-memory only, for he had no traditions.

When he drank, he drank to excess, and when he fought he fought for the mere fun of it, a joyous yielding to the lust of combat; or else, when the inherent sense of his simple justice was stirred and the red fire came to his blue eyes, he fought to kill, and it took four times his weight to drag him from his foe. Yet with all his hungry desires he was a temperate man, and possessed of an iron will which made self-control merely a matter of whim—whim in his case being but the frothy surface of a deeply ingrained code.

This night he had been paid off in San Francisco, and there was a dancing light back of his eyes, as he swung up Market Street with his pockets well lined and the tingling pleasure-instincts humming along his sound nerves—nothing to hold him, nothing to daunt him, no law but his own—and all the world to choose from.

He strolled along with his head back and an odd smile on his lips. The salt-thirst which had been banking up in him along the monotonous trail through the low, hot dunes of the Pacific, was still unslaked, and within the round tower of his throat, impish fingers were massaging the swallowing nerves, filling them with

that sting of anticipation which foretold glorious thrills when at last he gave free rein.

A newsboy offered him a paper, but he brushed the boy aside as he would have brushed a troublesome insect. Individualism had met individualism, and the thin gamin cursed the big rover with hot fluency. Knute Ericson gazed down at the mite in surprised appreciation, and then gave a gleeful chuckle. He bought the boy's entire stock, held it a moment while he scrutinised it in amused contempt at the thought of a grown man wasting his time in reading of what others had done, while all about him stood a city of treasures for whoever chose to take them. Then he threw the papers aloft in a scattering cloud and laughed a low-toned, mellow laugh, like the booming of surf in a narrow-necked cove.

This was going to be a night on which he could often ruminate with undimmed satisfaction, when once more there would be no man-stained land in sight, and he would be rocking over the deep with his blood-memories as a sub-bass and his fleeting recollections to carry the melody of an emotional obligato.

He turned into Kearney Street and followed it to Pacific, glancing in through the swinging doors of half a dozen saloons, sniffing the odours, swallowing the tempting water which gathered in his mouth, but nursing his strong thirst to still a higher potency. No anchorite, he, to deny himself the full feast of his sensations; no weakling, to gorge on fruit not yet come to the fullest bloom of ripeness.

Like a mischievous boy he teased the wolf of his appetite the while he spread his own feast of Tantalus; but openly he gloated because no chain bound him which he could not break when he would.

He materialised the sensations which would be his when the first bumper of strong liquor should ooze through his whole body; and those other sensations, when the soft, warm arms of the girl should clasp about his neck.

He had not yet even decided upon the type; in his slow, deliberate way, he had postponed visualising the girl herself, and was content with the tingling response his nature had given at the thought of the soft, warm arms which were to clasp him—after he had drunk enough to no longer care whether or not the morrow left him any money. Money was a small matter: he would still have his body, and there was always good pay for the labour power of such a body as his.

He crossed over and swaggered lightly through Chinatown, staring with good-natured contempt into the inscrutable faces of its inhabitants. He hoped they would take offence and try to mob him without forcing him to be the open aggressor. He had his own code in fighting, always preferring to fight on the defensive, and having a marked prejudice against firearms. Plain hands seemed to him the most consistent weapons, though he saw no impropriety in the use of knives, clubs, or convenient articles of furniture; but his indignation was always aroused at the thought of crowd-

ing out a soul through the small, sticky lips of a bullet wound.

A sign forbade whites from entering a dark alley; so he turned into it, hoping that some excuse would arise for the bumping of many smooth, saffron heads together; but the Celestials were as patient as himself, and jostle them as he would he could arouse no active resentment.

He went on to Dupont Street, shot at the targets, ridiculed the prowess of others, thrust his elbows carelessly into any faces showing a rudimentary belligerency, and generally indicated in a mild, knightly way that he was *en quest* and that any legitimate trouble would not be altogether unwelcome; but their discretion was not to be shaken, and he felt it was still too early to visit the localities where battle was always on tap for whosoever cared to crook his finger.

Finally he took his first drink, a small beer-glass of brandy. He swallowed slowly and gratefully, washing it about in his mouth and letting his palate take full toll. This was merely enough to heighten his zest, and his blue eyes were even more alert as he strolled down Grant Avenue to Market. It was still early and the throngs now on the street had planned for their evening's amusement.

The type of girl which he was seeking did not bother with details in her planning; she spread a net and waited: she was a fisher of men, and Knute Ericson desired to be caught.

He was no hypocrite, he was too independent to

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resort to flattery—even flattery of the Deity—so he picked his path without subterfuge and walked with his head thrown back. He was not respectable; but on the other hand his self-respect was so firm and sound it had never threatened to slip beneath his feet and, despite his strenuous life, he had never once cringed.

The land is man's slave, and upon its body the scars of yesterday, and the welts of to-day, will in turn be covered by the lash of to-morrow; but there is no past and no future for the sea. It lives forever in an endless day. Upon its face there is no brand of man's mastery, and so it concerns itself not with the changing codes of men; but whatever its mood and whatever its action, it gazes up open and fearless into the sky above; and as with the soul of the sea, so with the soul of Knute Ericson.

He turned up Geary and walked rapidly, simply because his surplus energy demanded an outlet. The houses were much alike, crouching close to the street, huddled shoulder to shoulder, and with short flights of steps leading from the front doors to the sidewalk. Few people were passing, and so he had a clear view of her as she walked nervously toward him. When they were half a block apart, she faced about and slowly retraced her steps, while he also decreased his speed, and examined the woman with his keen sea-eyes.

She was slender with graceful carriage and attractive lines, and he at once became interested in her. He knew that she had come forth in search of a man, and



he also knew that she had little relish for the quest. How he knew this he had no idea, for he was not given to analysis. His sensations were exact and his intuition almost equally so; but he had never sought explanation for his impulses or his convictions. He took himself as he took the sea.

He soon caught up with her and as he drew close to her side, she turned and glanced timidly into his face; after which her glance fell to the pavement. She had dark hair and large, dark eyes. Her face was very beautiful, and very sad; and it was the sadness which had given beauty to a face which had once been merely pretty. Knute Ericson sensed this and felt strangely ashamed. There was no reason for his feeling shame, so he shrugged his shoulders and asked: "Are you looking for some one?"

The woman did not look at him, but she nodded her head.

"Any one in particular?" he asked, bracing himself against the ebbing tide of his desires.

This time the woman shook her head, but drew a little apart from him toward the houses.

"Then will I do?" he asked, half hoping that she would say no, and leave him free to return to the swirl of the town where he could shake off this disquieting feeling of unearned shame; and once more be wafted by the breeze of his own recklessness.

"As well as another—if you have money," replied the woman contemptuously; but this time she looked him full in the face and held her eyes steady.

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Her steadfast gaze aroused in Knute Ericson's breast an excitement different from any which had ever before burned there. He felt that he could do much for this woman, and yet something held him back. He did not draw closer to her, he felt no impulse to touch her; but neither had he any intention of deserting this new type of adventure.

"Have you a room?" he asked.

"Yes, it is only a block from here," she replied shortly as she quickened her pace.

They spoke no further, and probably no two persons were farther apart in all happy-go-lucky San Francisco, than these twain as they walked silently side by side. But a few inches of clear, bracing air separated them, yet it seemed a solid wall of ice.

The woman turned into a hallway from which also opened the side door to a small, corner saloon, and as they started up the dimly lighted stairway an angry discussion over a card game floated out to them. She hurried to the far end of the upper hall, and with a smothered gasp opened a door and stepped inside.

He followed and waited in the dark until she could light the gas; but instead she locked the door, and crossing the room seated herself upon the bed whose outline was vaguely visible in the rays which filtered in from the street-light on the corner. He felt very helpless as he stood watching her, and when she sighed, he also sighed in uncomprehending sympathy.

"Well?" she asked, after a long pause.

Without answering he moved over to the window and

took a seat in the low rocker which stood there. The noise of a scuffle in the next room came to him, and for a moment he listened to the angry voices of a man and woman, quarrelling over money. When the quarrelling ceased, he leaned toward her and asked in a low tone: "How long you been in this business?"

"Business!" repeated the woman bitterly. "I have not been in it, yet."

"Then why start?" he asked bluntly. "You stand not much chance to succeed. You take away from a man that which you ought to arouse."

"I shall get hardened in time, I shall learn the game; but now it seems horrible, beastly."

The man shifted uneasily in his seat.

"Can't you get other work?"

"I have tried other work, I have supported myself for months; but first one thing and then another—Oh, there is no use! I have tried, but I have been beaten. No"—her voice was decisive—"I have to earn money some way, and this way seems the surest. As you say, it is business. If I put it off any longer my clothes will look worse, and I can't make as much money. I want the money."

Her words were harsh; yet something back of the words made it very plain to Knute Ericson that the woman herself was not harsh, but fiercely tender. He wondered why she needed the money, but without asking, he arose and lighted the gas. He examined the room and the woman, and both were shabby but both were clean. She appeared to be about twenty-five, and as

his eyes fell upon her worn, trembling hands, that odd sense of intangible responsibility returned to him, and with it a fierce desire came upon him to take up her battle.

He was not of the stuff of which investigating committees are made; he felt no call to fix blame or find excuse; he knew that the profession in which the woman was about to engage was older even than his own, and he had no delusions about it.

There was not a trace of sociology in his considerations; he did not feel the slightest contempt for the girls who sold their bodies, even as he sold his in another way when he placed his name upon a ship's articles. It was merely one of Fate's grim jests that on this night of his celebration, a bit of merchandise should appeal to him as a woman, and call forth from its depths his elemental manhood.

He was troubled because this woman had been wronged, and he was puzzled as to why his usually placid conscience should insist upon taking its own unwarranted share of the blame. In the marts of the world a man bought what was offered for sale, provided it suited his fancy and he had the price to pay; and this was all so reasonable that he was irritated to have a feeling of perfidy suddenly thrust upon himself. Doubtless some other man was at the bottom of her trouble, but this was no reason why such a rover as he should pick up responsibility which had not been thrust upon him. He looked into the woman's eyes, and felt the sway of them throughout his being.

"How much money do you need?" he asked.

The woman looked into his eyes—they were steel, now—and a wistful half-smile came to her face. Then she shook her head.

"It would be no use, it would merely postpone; and I might never be able to make myself take this step again."

Knute noticed the music in her voice, now that it had softened, and he also appreciated her choice of words. He had some taste in words, his ear was discriminating, and he had cultivated this because he had once admired the wreck of a man who had been a scholar.

"Would fifty dollars help you out?" he asked.

The woman breathed rapidly for a few moments; but before she could reply quick footsteps hurried down the hall and with them came the sound of incoherent sobbing. The man paid no heed to it, any sound was consistent with such a place; but his companion gave a startled gasp and flew to the door, which she unlocked and threw wide. A woman staggered into the room bearing in her arms the naked form of a two-year-old boy. The eyes of the child were closed and the mouth drooped pathetically; the hair was dripping wet.

The woman of the street seized the child, pressed it to her bosom, kissed the pale lips, and demanded fiercely:

"What is it, what is the matter—tell me what is wrong?"

The other woman was of heavier build, her features

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were coarse but kind, and now with bent elbows, hands opening and closing just above her shoulders, and her voice moaning brokenly, she was again proving that no matter how thick the callous spots may become, the parts below always remain tender.

"I don't know how it happened," she cried. "He was asleep on me bed, and I had just filled a tub to put some clothes to soak when Mrs. Flannigan called me to the door to tell me about Micky. I only went to the corner with her, but when I came back he was in the tub, and I couldn't bring him to. I rubbed him and rolled him; but oh, God—I couldn't bring him to!"

The mother placed the child upon the bed in terrible calmness, there was even the trace of a triumphant smile upon her lips.

"There is nothing to hold me now," she murmured in a tone of relief as she stood looking down at the marble form. "Ah, baby, baby, you didn't ask it of me after all! Sleep gently, little babe, mother is coming. Mother will be with you soon."

She had forgotten the others, and why not—she had also forgotten the world which held them. Love comes with giving, and in giving herself, such love had come to her as those pampered women who are only mothers by proxy, never, never can know. For months this mother had borne a crushing cross up a heavy hill. She had given with love, she had given her all, but she had still fallen short of meeting the needs of her child; and now at the top of her hill with the cross securely planted, a great freedom had come to her. All

the useless struggle was behind and below her, and during the few remaining hours of anguish, she would be apart from the world and could say as from a great height, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Knute Ericson had stood in the shadow of the tawdry curtains, his huge frame as rigid as a block of stone. He could not understand the change in the woman, for he was elemental, he stood squarely upon the earth and met physical force with physical force. To stand upon a martyr's grave and to say meekly, "Oh, Death, where is thy sting?" would have seemed to him but a cowardly subterfuge.

It suddenly occurred to him that in spite of its location, this was his field, and he stepped to the bed and thrust the mother to one side. She looked into his face, saw the new light there, and ceased to resist him. He was at ease now, this was work fitted to his hands. Whoever works skilfully works gracefully, and in spite of her warring emotions, the woman watched him with an odd fascination.

With quick, sure movements—gentle in spite of his ponderous strength—he emptied the lungs of water, he worked the tiny arms, he fairly forced a renewed respiration; and in a short time an outraged wail burst from the child's lips—humanity's customary protest against assuming or resuming the responsibilities of existence.

Then, half-mechanically the mother took towels and rubbed the child briskly, comforting him the while with

cooings and caresses. Slipping a clean gown upon him she placed him next to the wall, and stroked his little back. Soon he fell asleep, for faith is a heritage rather than an acquisition, and neither danger to body nor to soul can rob a child of its sleep.

Then the face of the mother fell into the crook of her arm, and she lay beside the child, silent and prostrate from reaction. Knute Ericson motioned the other woman to leave the room, and closed the door after her as one having authority. The ancient patience of the sea was his, and he stolidly resumed his seat by the window to await what was still to come.

After a time the woman roused herself to again sit upon the edge of the bed, and to look at the man with steady but weary eyes.

"I cannot thank you," she said. "It would have been so much easier just to follow after. Now—now——"

"Now," he took the word from her lip, while his lower jaw hardened as it did when the fighting began to press, "now, I, myself, have some say in this matter—and I am a man."

She did not speak; there was nothing to say.

"Who is the father of this child?" he asked.

For answer she opened the top drawer of her bureau and showed him her marriage certificate. She also showed him the photograph of a flashily dressed man, a man with a weak, cruel face; but whose small curled moustaches indicated supreme self-satisfaction.

"This creature," said the woman scornfully.



Knute gazed upon the pictured face and a hot fury gathered in his breast. No need for him to match feature against feature; the very soul of the degenerate stood naked before him, and his fist clenched with slow, crushing force as he pictured how it had gloated in petty tyranny as it had heaped humiliation upon the clean soul of the woman. The grip of his fist tightened until the nails bit into the horny palm of his hand.

"Where is he, now?" he asked quietly. The sea is quiet, strangely quiet and it is generally most quiet when the storm forces are gathering.

"I do not know; but I think I have seen him twice lately. I think he is watching me."

"Yes, that would be his way," murmured Knute Ericson thoughtfully. "How did you happen to marry *him*?"

"I have asked myself that same question a thousand times—I am no longer able to answer it. When I married him I loved him, or I was insane; I cannot tell which. I lived in a small town and we were comfortable. He spent a few weeks there—Oh, it all seems like strangers in a different world when I look back upon it!

"My mother never liked him, but I fell in love with him and married him. We went to live in New York, and even after I found he was a crook and a gambler, I loved him. He had to leave New York, and we came here, but the gang would not let him in, and"—she paused a moment, and then her voice grew hard—"he finally told me I had to go on the street. When I

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refused he threatened. But I could not do it. I was willing to work or to starve—but I could not do that. When his debts began to meet him at every turn, he simply ran away and left me to face it.

“I tried to work for the child, but I could not find the right place. It was a constant struggle to keep my lips above water, until the real waters of the Bay began to coax and beckon to me. At night, especially at night, when the floating filth could not be seen, the dark waters in the shadow of the dock seemed like soft satin, and I could hear gentle voices murmuring and pleading with me. I went there first by accident and then I went to be soothed, until it was all I could do to keep out of the waters—the waters which pleaded and promised and coaxed at me.”

Her voice had become tense, and Knute nodded his head knowingly.

“Ah, I know the waters,” he said, his deep voice at last finding the simple note of friendship in this topic of mutual interest. “The waters paint pictures and tell stories and sing songs; but it is only the dirty dock-waters that coax you to give up and die. Out in the open the spray is kicked out before the dancing toe of a vessel until, in the sunlight, it becomes like baby rainbows at play, or, in the moonlight, like the thin veil between our own world and the other. Out there the waters tell only of life. Things have I seen down there in the split of the waves that never on shore has any man ever seen—but they have never coaxed me to die. To fight, yes. To scorn death, yes.

But to give up and die—Oh, no, no, no. That is but the lies of the dirty, dead waters about a dock.”

The woman’s eyes had brightened while listening to him, but they grew dull again as she went on with her story.

“There must have been some place for me if I could but have found it; but I could not find it. They were good to me, these other women who have found their hard, narrow places, they kept my child for me when they could, they shared their little with me; but they measured me with sure eyes, and one and all they whispered that it would have to be the street in the end; and that the sooner I went the better chance I’d stand. I really did not care for myself; but for the child”—she turned and looked at the little face, rosy and beautiful in sleep, and then broke into a dry sob—“I could do anything, anything for the child.”

Knute Ericson had nervously shifted his position several times as the woman finished, and now he pointed a huge finger at the marriage certificate, and asked with childlike simplicity:

“That paper, now, don’t that guarantee you something—a living, or protection for the child, or something?”

The woman was more sophisticated than the man, yet she too was but a lonely child lost in the world’s grey tangle, and the hopelessness of torturing questions long unanswered was in her eyes as she slowly shook her head.

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Knute recalled that he had made no comment upon her story.

"You were taking the proper step," he said heartily. "For the child it was right, anything is right for a child; but for this—this——" His voice died away to a guttural hiss as he looked at the photograph, and again his hand clenched slowly.

There was nothing academic about Knute Ericson, he knew little of history and had no pet theories to exploit. He was merely one of the primitive, elemental men who serve as the storage-batteries of power, who lead their simple lives in obscurity until a civilisation begins to corrode from the twin acids of senseless wealth and senseless poverty, and the rusty bands of individual morality snap one after another.

Knute Ericson lived by race morality, caring little for method and less for dogma; but insisting upon results. Deep in his heart, but all unconscious to himself, had been graven the general order: "Thy woman must have a song in her heart, and merriment must dance in the eyes of thy child."

So long as individual morality provided these conditions, he had no quarrel with it; but when the heart of the one woman who had stirred the very depths of him, was echoing with the hollow mockery of a persecution she could not understand, and the life-thread of the baby she loved had become the clanging chain which bound her to her galley-bench, he was not first compelled to plough out a matted tangle of long-cherished forms and prejudices before he could consider this one

case according to the justice which spoke to him in the free and unrestrained voice of his own instinct.

The elemental men are not master workmen, they are merely instruments, storage batteries, dynamos and sharp-cutting tools; and an instrument has but little need of philosophy. Rugged manhood is the steel of which these primitive instruments are formed, race morality is the temper, the cutting edge is of simple courage which will not dull or turn even at the granite wall of death; and they are driven by that stored-up vital life-principle which they gather day by day from the surplus of nature with which they are in such close harmony.

They change not according to the fashions of men; philosophies and religions come and go, but they still hear the song and sing the song which all men sang before ever the art of speech had been invented. They do not work by plan, for they are instruments; yet whenever degeneracy stifles the song in the hearts of too many women and puts hungry suspicion into the eyes of too many children, then do the primitive chisels begin to cut, and every institution which has become foul and infected is removed before the cutting is done. Let man build for the ages if he will, but let him remember this in his building: race-morality is the master-law of the world, and individual morality can only survive when it is in accord with it.

Knute remained silent for a long time while picture after picture unrolled before him, and then he began to speak in a low voice, his eyes on the floor.

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“ When I was a baby my father died and my mother married again. We lived in the wheat district of Minnesota. My stepfather beat me, for each little thing he beat me; and yet I worked harder than ever before did any boy work. When there was not work to be done at home, he rented me out, beating me each time I returned and taking all my wages. It was upon the farm of my own father that this man lived, and yet he beat me like a dog and like a slave. Often my mother would fight for me, and then he would beat her, too.

“ When I was fourteen, I was big like a man; so I tried to kill him. Before I could finish, my mother dragged me away and begged me to leave. I sailed on the lakes first and then on the ocean, on all the oceans. I never went back; because my mother did not want me to kill him and I could not understand it. I have looked down into the waters of all the oceans, and have seen him lying there upon the ground with his face covered with blood where I had struck him with my club. I never felt sorry for this; I always burned to keep on striking and striking until you could not tell it had ever been the face of a man!

“ I have never abused a child or a woman, I never could. I have thought of many things, always, but most I wondered why I sailed where I sailed, for I never cared. Now I know—I was sailing to you. I shall take you as my woman, and your child shall be my son, my own son. I have much softness in my heart, he shall have it all. Once when the schooner

went ashore in a gale on Lake Erie, I saw the green winter-wheat hiding under the snow. This is the way that the softness in my heart has been kept alive, and he shall have it all. Oh, it is very plain why I have been sailing this way and that about the world. It was not at all of an accident, it was just that I might be on that street this night, to be the real father of your little boy."

His voice was low and steady with an undercurrent of calm assurance; and as she listened the woman studied his face and a light of hope came to her eyes as she reached behind her and touched the child gently; but she shuddered as the gaunt hand of Individual Morality reached out of the gloom and rested upon her shoulder.

"No, it cannot be," she said, shaking her head. "I should trust you, but——"

"I do not ask you to be as a wife to me," he said with an instinctive delicacy almost inconsistent in a male human. "I shall leave you my money—I have over three hundred dollars—and I shall go to sea again. I shall sail as a mate from now on and learn navigation. I know much of it already; and I can work hard, with my mind as well as with my body, when I wish. The child shall be your child and my child, but you shall be free until such time as you wish to be my woman. I am of a very great patience."

"Yes, but I am already the wife of another," said the woman sadly.

"Oh, yes, of this rat," he rejoined, looking down at

## 252 KNUTE ERICSON'S CELEBRATION

the photograph. "Then I shall not go to sea. I shall take a small farm or truck patch, and you can cook for me. When I was a boy I could work eighteen hours a day with hate in my heart. Now, I can work twenty for the boy and for you. After I have met the rat you will be free to marry me or not, just as you please."

The woman breathed rapidly. It seemed like the coming true of one of those dimly whispered dreams which, as an antidote, had come to her with the coaxing voices of the Bay, bidding her wait and hope and fight just a little longer. This was not like life, this setting aside of laws and customs, simply because they were grinding up the souls of one woman and one child. She felt confidence in the strength and gentleness of this great blond man who had come sailing to her across all the seven seas; and she felt something more, but just what this was she could not know.

She could not know that the nerves of an individual reach back without a break along the stem of evolution to the primitive roots of the race itself; to that ancient time when it was respectable and modest for a woman to select as her mate the man who could protect her child—and so she was filled with wonder and with doubt.

The man had made his plea, the woman was considering it; and so they sat silent. It was late, and the rest of the human warren and the street outside were also still. In this silence, heavy with doubt and



hope, there came a single footstep at the head of the stair. The face of the woman turned white and her hands clasped upon her breast. The eyes of the man were upon the face of the woman, and his face changed with hers; but he did not move from his seat by the window, she did not move from her seat on the bed; and thus they waited while the stealthy steps crept closer to the door.

At last the door was flung wide, and the man they had both been awaiting, stepped in, closed the door, and locked it. He glanced at the large man whose stolid features now appeared heavy and vacant; and then with malignant triumph, he glared at the woman, his woman.

"I've caught you at last, huh?" he sneered. "You who were too good, you who would rather die first! How long have you been at this?"

The clasped hands of the woman had fallen to her lap and her whole body drooped. She noted the similarity of the question to the one Knute Ericson had asked her long ago, long, long ago; and in a dull, vague way she wondered why the question did not pain her as much coming from the lips of the man who was her husband under the law, as it had when asked by an utter stranger. She did not answer the question, or even look at the questioner.

"How much money you got?" asked the husband brutally. "You're my wife, don't forget that; and it's going to take a fair bit of cash to square things with me."

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"Air you vera dronk?" asked Knute Ericson in a slow drawl.

The husband turned and looked into the innocent blue eyes, gazing at him mildly from out the large, meek face; and he became very angry. He had been drinking, but not to excess.

"Look here, square head," he snarled, "you'd better keep your trap closed. Do you know what I can hang on you for being caught in a room with my wife?"

"No," drawled Knute, shaking his head seriously, "Ay do nit know. Vat could you hang on me?"

"I could have you sent to the pen if I wanted to, or I could shoot you, and any jury in the land would clear me. A wife can't testify against her husband even if she wants to, and the unwritten law would be all I'd need in this case."

A look of fear had flashed across Knute's face at the threat of shooting, and at sight of this the woman on the bed had straightened with a look of surprised disgust. Then she settled back once more into the lassitude of hopelessness.

"Ay tenk Ay vill go," said Knute, rising to his feet.

"No, you won't," threatened the husband, drawing a revolver from his pocket. "It's going to cost you something to get out of this. How much money you got?"

"Ay have tree hunert toller," replied Knute, sinking into his seat and gazing fixedly at the revolver.

"Get it out," commanded the man, his eyes glittering avariciously.

"Vill you let me go, den?"

"Yes, I'll let you off this time."

"And ta voman—vat of her?"

"That's none of your damned business. Hand over the money."

The husband stepped closer, keeping the revolver carefully pointed at Knute, and the big man trembled awkwardly as he pulled some loose change from his pocket and handed it over with a heavy sigh. He next fumbled in an inner vest pocket, and pulled out a sack of gold pieces which he regarded sadly. The husband reached and snatched it. "Give it to me," he snapped.

As the bag of gold was seized, the left hand of the big sailor shot out and gripped the wrist which had allowed the revolver to waver.

"Ay tenk Ay sall take ta gun," he drawled even more slowly.

The husband drew back his free hand to strike, but this also was seized at the wrist. The primitive man was now smiling like a pleased child, the face of the civilised parasite was wrinkling into lines of pain.

"Do not make any noise," said Knute Ericson, dropping his accent, but still speaking slowly, "and lay the gun ve-ry softly upon the carpet. I not like to fool with guns."

The husband could feel the bones of his wrist grinding together, and he leaned forward as requested, and

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laid the revolver on the carpet. Knute gently pushed the weapon to the wall with his foot; after which he crossed the man's wrists and held them in one of his hands, while he felt for additional arms with the other.

"Now, listen," he said calmly, as soon as he had satisfied himself that the man was unarmed, "we do not wish any noise. If you make even enough noise to waken the child, I pick you up and dash your head upon the floor. Like this—see?"

He suddenly clutched the man by coat-collar and ankle, raised him over his head, and swung him head-first toward the floor. The man gave a smothered groan; but with a wrench which tore the cloth at the shoulder, Knute stopped him a few inches from the floor, straightened, and set him gently upon his feet.

"You do not weigh much, rat," he said candidly, "and I am very strong."

The man was trembling with fear and beads of sweat appeared upon his pallid forehead; his breath came in gasps.

"What are you going to do with me?" he faltered.

"Kill you, I hope," grinned Knute Ericson. "You have been making laws for this woman; now she shall make laws for you."

Both men turned to the woman, and upon each face was a question. An old, old drama was taking place in that tawdry room. Whenever woman is forced to hold the scales of justice, then it is a civilisation itself which is being weighed in the balance.

The woman sat with her child upon the bed behind

her, her hands were clenched, and her mouth was hard and merciless. It was thus the women looked behind the barricades of Paris; had her mind been theatrical, she would have held forth her fist, thumb down. The child's life had been passed amid stormy scenes; he was not disturbed, and in the silence of the room his soft, regular breathing was plainly heard.

The woman spoke no word, and after a long moment of waiting, Knute Ericson stepped behind the victim, whom fear had made too limp to resist.

"First I shall punish you some for your evil ways," he said simply, "and then I shall twist your neck."

He seized the man's wrists and slowly twisted and bent them upward behind his back until the man was lifted from the floor; after which he shook him. The degenerate bit his lip until the blood came, the sweat rolled from his face, his eyes started from their sockets—but he made no sound, no sound but the gritting of tendon over joint.

"Oh, don't; it's too horrible!"

At the tone of horror in the woman's voice, Knute immediately lowered the man, whose knees could no longer support him and who crumpled to the floor. The woman was leaning forward, her hands clutching the bosom of her dress, her eyes wide with sympathetic dread. Knute Ericson regarded her in dumb amazement; it must be that all good women were this way, even as his own mother had been. The woman glanced at his face and read the inquiry:

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"Oh, don't," she whispered hoarsely, "I can't stand it."

"What shall I do with him, then?" The question was naïve, childlike and full of wonder; for the question came from out the ancient innocence of the race itself.

"Don't let him hurt me again, don't let him hurt me, Mary!" pleaded the man, grovelling at her feet. "I'll come back to you again, I'll be good to you; only make him let me alone."

She did not even glance at him. It was the tender part of her own nature which she was instinctively guarding. What had once been her husband was now nothing but a wounded animal with an animal's capacity for physical suffering.

"Listen, rat," said Knute Ericson with his convincing simplicity, "I shall not kill you, this time; but it would be much better for you to die. I shall take this woman and this child to be my woman and my child. You know about laws and such things; see to it that the law is satisfied. Next time I see you, if the law has not made her a widow, I shall myself make her one."

He thrust the man contemptuously with his foot and turned to the woman. "Do you owe anything?" he asked.

"I owe fifty cents to the woman who cared for the baby. I had to borrow of her to buy milk."

"Give her this dollar," said Knute Ericson, "and then pack up what you want to take along."

She glanced at the child, took the bill, and left the room. Knute picked up the man and set him upon a chair with a jolt that shook the room.

"Rat," he confessed in a slightly disappointed tone, "so far as I know, I have never killed a man; but do you be very careful to keep out of my way after this. I do not like you."

He picked up the revolver, removed the cylinder, and with his great hands twisted barrel upon stock until the weapon was useless, after which he tossed it upon the bureau top. The eyes of the man had watched him in shuddering fascination, and Knute caught the glance.

"It is such hell-toys as that, that make rats like you dangerous," he said reprovingly.

The woman returned and put her small property into a suitcase and bundle. Then she dressed the baby, who was still so limp with sleep that even this did not awaken him. The husband sat in his chair like one dazed by a drug, his numb arms hanging like ropes from his shoulders. The woman did not look at him.

Knute Ericson lifted the child and kissed him tenderly on the cheek.

"You are no longer the son of a rat," he said with proud dignity, as he held the child from him; "you are my son, and your quarrels are my quarrels before ever they are begun."

Then he folded the child into the hollow of his great left arm, picked up bundle and suitcase with his right hand, and motioned the woman into the hall with a nod.

He stepped to the side of the man who was gazing at him with pale, squinting eyes, and said softly:

"You have a full month in which to satisfy the law, rat. After that I shall hunt for you. I do not want you to stay anywhere along this western coast."

Out in the hall the woman was trying to make herself feel shame because she did not feel shame. She recalled her mother, her marriage vows, all and everything which should make her feel ashamed; but she could not feel it—she only felt freedom.

She had drunk of race morality, the stern morality which does not wink at subterfuge, but says: "Cover no rotting sores with fine linen, ye are not clean unless ye are clean to the very core." She had drunk deep of this, and the draft had made her strong.

And she had at last found a man who would not regard her as a chattel but would stand as a buffer between her and the wolves and vultures. She was not able to reason about it, she could only lean confidently upon this new, sturdy faith which had come to her, and say with Ruth of old: "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God."

Knute came out into the hall bearing the child, and with downcast eyes she shut the door after them. She drew a full, deep breath as the door closed, it seemed also to close upon her dreary, hopeless past; and then she followed the man down the stairs and into the street—this stranger, whose name even she did not know.



Her wan face brightened with its first free smile in months as the child moved in its sleep, reached up a chubby arm, and encircled the man's neck; but when the man leaned his cheek caressingly against the child's head, her eyes filled with tears, happy, welcome tears.

Knute Ericson, the Earth-man, stood upon the sidewalk and looked into the woman's eyes.

"Which way?" he asked.

Oh, it was the wine of life to her to be once more treated as an individual, to have her wishes consulted, to enjoy both the form and the spirit of freedom! The shattered tendrils of her prudery had sought on every side for shame, but instead, had found self-respect; she had reached desperately forth in the darkness to take her cross, and when she had drawn back her hand, lo, it had held a crown; her own body had been given back into her own keeping, and this great, blond man had come out of the night and out of the ages, to guard it for her. The glory of a free soul, raised for the first time above the reck of prejudice and daring to look without fear and without apology into the face of its Maker, was upon her; and she marvelled at the currents of new life which swept through her.

Knute Ericson continued to look into her face, and something of awe came to him at the white peace which glowed like pure fire upon it.

"Which way?" he repeated in yet a softer voice.

"Any way at all, and I shall follow," she answered, and her eyes met his, as the eyes of the first woman met the eyes of the first man; and neither was afraid.



# THE PARCEL

BY

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THE LODGER—*McClure's Magazine*

WHY THEY MARRIED—*Scribner's Magazine*

THE CHINK IN THE ARMOUR—*A Novel*

THE WOMAN FROM PURGATORY—*McClure's Magazine*



## X

### THE PARCEL

**T**HE fat German Landsturmer, Gustav Shenck—at once so much and so little a soldier—toiled up the steep central street of Douvenay, the Champagne village where were quartered General Prince Botho von Bedingen and his Staff.

Shenck was Chief Military Postman of the Staff, and as such felt himself to be an important personage. But the work his position entailed was onerous to one who was stout and short of breath.

This morning he was laden and overladen with the well-filled bags of the Field Post Service. They had been adjusted on to his shoulders, placed over his arm, one even hung about his neck by his zealous subordinates. And the bags, in addition to postcards and letters, contained parcels—quantities of parcels—for the most part filled with *delicatessen*, humble and luxurious, according to whether they were for officers or men.

Gustav Shenck's load was heavy, and his heart was heavy too; for he himself had received a letter from home to-day, and it said that things were not going well in Saxony, that life was getting, even now, in these early weeks of war, more difficult every day. True, all through the letter there was the insistent

hope and belief that soon glorious victory would send the warriors of Germany home to their hearths, each with his share of a huge indemnity wrung from wealthy France. But as he read those words of cheer, the Landsturmer had shaken his head.' There were curious rumours current, even in quiet Douvenay—persistent rumours that there had been some kind of defeat and halt just before Paris, and that all was not quite as well with the prospects of a quick campaign as every one had been led to expect would be the case.

Still, Shenck was a kindly, easy-going fellow, and he had a smile and a nod for most of the grey-clad soldiers who came hurrying out of the houses on either side of the village street. The French inhabitants of Douvenay kept, as much as was possible, out of sight, though certain of their small children played about on the sun-splashed cobbles. With these the Saxon Field-Postman was on very kindly terms. Indeed, his heart sometimes yearned toward these little creatures who were, as he well knew, destined to become German; for this lovely backwater village was in the heart of that smiling, opulent province of Champagne which the Kaiser intended to keep after the war. That being so, it seemed indeed a pity that these same children's mothers and grandmothers—their fathers were far away fighting, and their grandmothers had mostly fled from the place at the approach of the dreaded enemy—should be so sulky, in some cases so disagreeable, to the Germans now in peaceful occupation of their homes.

On Shenck trudged, up the sunny street. And then, gradually, his face cleared, for he was approaching a spot where he knew himself sure of courtesy, and even of something better than courtesy, of a smiling welcome.

Standing well back from the paved roadway, behind a high iron gate, above which swung a big gilt bell, was a delightful looking house, running partly round a spacious courtyard. Built of red brick, now faded to a delicate rose pink, the walls, though it was late September, were wreathed with white and yellow flowering climbers; and in the courtyard stood six green tubs filled with miniature orange trees. This was La Maison Bissonet, the property of Léon Bissonet, Mayor of Douvenay, in peace times a prosperous, and even in a modest way a famous, nurseryman. It was in La Maison Bissonet that General Prince of Bedingen, a veteran of 1870, had fixed his own quarters, instead of in the rat-beridden, unlived-in Château outside the village.

Shenck rang the bell, and a moment later Madame Bissonet came across the flagged courtyard. She threaded her way quickly among the shining green boughs of the little orange trees; and as she came forward, smiling, she made a charming picture in her red and white check gown, and large, clean, white apron. Though she had a married daughter, and was close on forty, Madame Bissonet was still a very pretty woman. The colour came and went in her rounded cheeks, her eyes were bright and dark, her hair abundant, her teeth

small and white. But then the Mayoress of Douvenay was by birth a *Parisienne*, and her husband, very absurdly, or so most of his old friends and neighbours thought, allowed her to lead the life of a *bourgeoise*. Till the outbreak of war, Madame Bissonet had always had a resident servant.

As she came up to the gate with a key in her hand, she made a pantomimic gesture, and called out—of course in French—"Nothing for me, eh?" and the German shook his head, gaily. It was now quite an old joke between them, renewed at least once, sometimes twice, each day. Thanks to their good-natured Prince-billet, the Mayor of Douvenay and his wife enjoyed many little privileges, but that of receiving news from the outside world was not among them. The letters and parcels which were left in such prodigal numbers at La Maison Bissonet were all, of course, for the General, and for the two aides-de-camp who shared his pleasant quarters.

Madame Bissonet's guest—for so he courteously termed himself—was not only a distinguished, if aged, warrior, he was also one of the most popular bachelor hosts of Berlin; and it was believed by his Staff that most of his letters and parcels came from fair ladies who were mindful of favours past, as well as of favours to come.

The Prince was a burly, open-handed old fellow, bearing well his sixty-six years of life; and the Bissonets might well account themselves fortunate in having him in their house. His hostess, on her side, made him



thoroughly comfortable, and he often secretly wished he had such a woman to look after his household in Berlin!

And now, as she held out her large, white apron, she was still smiling—smiling as few Frenchwomen ever smiled in those days. But Madame Bissonet was a fortunate woman. No one belonging to her was in the fighting line, and her only child, a daughter, had married last spring a Parisian who worked in the War Office; and thus was among the non-combatants of France.

But though, following the French fashion, her daughter is mentioned first in her affections, Madame Bissonet's child did not count in her life as did that child's father, Léon Bissonet. Most Frenchwomen are mothers first and lovers a long way after; but that was not so with this Frenchwoman.

Prince von Bedingen, who had all your old bachelor's softness of heart, had been touched, as well as amused, by the passionate affection his host and hostess bore one another. They were more like bride and bridegroom than an old married couple. When she heard her husband's heavy footsteps—Léon was twelve years older than his Louise—Madame Bissonet's eyes would brighten, the colour would come into her cheeks, and her confident, rather hard manner would melt away into tenderness.

The Mayor of Douvenay was a fine type of yeoman Frenchman, but he had aged very much in the last few weeks, and there were lines of stern endurance on

his face. In every way he was unlike his clever, eager, happy looking wife. It was not that Madame Bissonet did not care for her country, it was rather that she had that touching, one may almost call it that sublime, confidence in France which most Frenchwomen have. She believed that her country could be trusted to take care of itself, and, as we know, she was to be justified of her confidence. But her whole heart was wrapped up in her husband and in her home; and these two were safe.

She locked the great gate again on the broadly smiling Military Postman, and, walking more slowly, for her apron was now full of letters and parcels, she made her way back into her large, cheerful looking kitchen, bright with its gleaming *batterie de cuisine*; and emptied out the contents of her apron on to her wide, well-scrubbed table.

The Prince had gone off yesterday on a three days' visit to a brother General's Headquarters, and though it was absurd to say so even to oneself, Madame Bissonet found she quite missed her bluff old enemy. He was so polite, so—well yes, so gallant, to this happy-natured, pretty Frenchwoman! He had actually gone to the trouble to arrange that during his absence his two young aides-de-camp should be elsewhere, so that the Mayor of Douvenay and his wife should have these three days alone together.

Madame Bissonet looked with fleeting curiosity at the letters addressed in the German script she was getting to know so well, and also, more carefully, at the

addresses inscribed on the well-packed parcels. Then she smiled again. The Prince had said, doubtless in joke, that *she* should have a parcel some day! That he would arrange to have one specially sent to her by the Military Field Post.

She sat down for a few minutes. It was pleasant to feel that there was no one in the house, and that she and her husband would have a quiet, undisturbed hour in which to eat their *déjeuner*. They were going to have a piece of cold veal, a salad and a mayonnaise sauce. The sauce was already made, and the salad was draining in the larder. . . .

The bell above the gate clanged out. Very quietly—for she did not suppose it could be anything of consequence—Madame Bissonet opened the door giving on to the courtyard. Then she gave a little cry of surprise and welcome, for she saw that her husband, her Léon, stood outside, although he was not due home for another hour. He always spent the whole morning, from eight o'clock onward, in the rather shabby building, low down in the village, which was the Mairie of Douvenay.

Even before she reached the gate he called out: "I've got to go to Chandlieu to-day!" Then he stopped, for Léon Bissonet was a man of few words.

She opened the gate, and together, she with her plump little hand on his coat sleeve, they walked toward the house.

The Mayor of Douvenay was a tall man, with fine, regular features, and though he looked his full age of

fifty-two, there was no lack of decision on his face, or of strength in his firm footsteps.

Léon Bissonet had been only eight years old in 1870, but he well remembered all that had happened then; and though he had said nothing of it to his wife, when the Prussian General, his Staff, and some eight hundred men had ridden into Douvenay three weeks ago, it was as if death had suddenly overshadowed his soul—death, with no hope of resurrection. He was, of course, dully aware that things might have been much worse than they were, but, even so, the hours he spent down at the Mairie were punctuated by many disagreeable and painful incidents, of which he said nothing to his wife. The Prince's subordinates were not so courteous and well-bred as the Prince himself, and more than one of the German officers had taken a violent dislike to the unsmiling Mayor, and took pleasure in being as insolent and as insulting to him as they dared be. The fact that the Prince now happened to be absent from Douvenay had already made a difference for the worse, and the Frenchman had welcomed the official summons, couched in the curious archaic French in which all German proclamations in France were then couched, commanding his presence at Chandlieu, a market town some twelve miles away. He had already been sent for there within three days of the occupation of his village, but on that occasion the Prince had placed a military motor at his disposal. The business concerning which the Mayor of Douvenay had been summoned, on that first occasion, had been the

requisition of a certain amount of cattle; and the German Quartermaster, if abrupt, had not been uncivil. Léon Bissonet supposed that it was something of the same kind now, and he actually looked forward to the change of thought and scene. But this time, instead of being conveyed in one of the Prince's motors, he was to go there on a lorry. That would take rather longer, but it was all one to him.

It was not all one to Madame Bissonet: "What a pity the Prince is away, *he* would have given you a car. It will be a hot, tiring journey." She was looking at him anxiously, wondering, with a flutter of the heart, whether that slow-moving, military stores lorry, was likely to pass across any of the danger zone; that zone where the French shells did such constant and such deadly harm to passing German convoys and ammunition wagons. She hoped the lorry would start after dark. But that hope was disappointed.

"I have to start in an hour," he said slowly, "so I've brought up the keys of the Mairie. I'd better have something to eat, a bit of bread and cheese will do, and then I'll go up and dress."

She put out the nice *déjeuner* she had looked forward to sharing with him; and then she went upstairs, and busied herself putting out her husband's best clothes. The black suit he had bought new when he had been elected Mayor of his native village, and which he wore at funerals, at weddings, and at christenings, was laid by her across a chair; and after a moment's hesitation, she chose the white waistcoat in

which he always celebrated a civil marriage. Then, very carefully, she brushed his top hat.

Madame Bissonet had all your true Frenchwoman's pride in, and love of, her bedroom. It was a large, sunny room with four windows, and overlooked the nursery garden which stretched for many acres behind the house. When she was very young, at a time of her girlhood which she never cared to remember, a gentleman who was a famous artist, as well as a Parisian, had declared that yellow was her colour. And so, although in France yellow is supposed to be unlucky, fine old yellow brocade curtains looped up the large, low bed which was sunk back in a recess of the wall; and the same brocade, an *épave* from a sale held at the Château about the time of the Léon Bissonets' romantic wedding—for theirs, unlike most French village weddings, had been a romantic wedding—also covered the comfortable, First Empire arm-chairs, and the uncomfortable, narrow, Empire sofa, which was an object of luxury, not of use.

At the head of the bed, under the crucifix and the bit of blessed box which Madame Bissonet had brought back from church last Palm Sunday, hung her wedding wreath, in a concave glass frame. And set cross-wise from one of the windows, was a large, plain writing-table. It was at that writing-table that Léon Bissonet liked to make his accounts, and to do any other writing work that he did not care should be interrupted by inquisitive friends and neighbours downstairs. Standing on rockers, close to the writing-table,

was the curious, old-fashioned rosewood cradle in which the daughter of the house had lain eighteen years ago.

Long since Madame Bissonet had wished to put the cradle tidily away; more recently she had laughingly suggested that it should accompany the newly-married couple to their Paris home; but each time Léon Bissonet had shaken his head. He liked to see the cradle where it was. As he bent over his writing-table, making out his bills, he had only to look up and give a little glance aslant, to be carried back to the time when he was by far the proudest husband, as well as the happiest father, in Douvenay.

But since the outbreak of war there had been no accounts to make out, so the writing-table was now never used. To-day, however, Madame Bissonet, after putting out her husband's best clothes, sat down there, and hurriedly wrote a letter.

Having eaten his frugal luncheon, the Mayor of Douvenay came upstairs, treading heavily through the empty house.

His wife stayed with him while he dressed, and they discussed, or rather she discussed, his visit to Chandlieu. It was in that prosperous country town that much of the produce of their nursery garden had always been disposed of, in the days that already seemed so long ago; and Madame Bissonet began wondering whether Léon would have time to go and see some of the wives and daughters of their old clients, for their

clients almost to a man had gone, either to their regiments, or in flight before the incoming tide of the German invasion.

At last the Mayor, looking every inch a Mayor, was ready, his hat in his hand, and smiling—smiling down at his wife as he never smiled at any one else. And she, on her side, jumped up from the chair on which she had been sitting, and, running up to him, threw her arms round his neck and kissed him—kissed him—kissed him: “Good-bye, my darling,” she said, and suddenly ran to the writing-table, while he stared at her perplexed.

From under the thin, pink blotting-paper, covered with its greying marks of long-dried ink, she drew out an envelope addressed to their daughter in Paris, and came and put it in his hand. “You may have a chance of getting this through——” her voice dropped instinctively, though they were alone in the house. “She must be fretting about us sadly, poor child.”

A look of doubt flitted over his face. “You’ve been careful?” he murmured.

“But yes!” she still spoke under her breath. “I’ve told her nothing—only that we are well, and—and well treated. But I expect you’ll have to bring the letter back. It isn’t likely that you’ll again have such a chance as you had last time.” And she sighed. Last time a Chandlieu lady, who was a very old friend as well as a client, had offered to carry a letter through to Paris. But there had been no opportunity of getting the letter written.



They walked down the shallow, slippery, walnut-wood staircase which was one of the features of the old French dwelling which Prince von Bedingen most loudly admired.

The house was full of sunny stillness, and of a peace which, to Léon Bissonet, was very agreeable. Unlike his wife, he hated the presence of the good-natured, burly German Prince. To him that presence was a pollution of the homestead where he and his father had been born. That a Prussian soldier, however courteous, however carelessly good-humoured, should occupy even that portion of the large, roomy old house which he and his wife never used was hateful to him. But then the Mayor of Douvenay had very little imagination. He never told himself, as did his wife often, that but for the Prince's presence there their house might have been filled, from top to bottom, as were others in the village, with a rough soldiery, commanded by officers who, if not rough, were yet often insolently discourteous to their French hosts.

Though he was glad to be away, even for a day, from the Mairie, and from odious exactions and unreasonable demands, Léon Bissonet was sorry that his absence was to take place on one of the few days when he and his wife were to have solitary possession of their house. Madame Bissonet had never really made friends with any of the village women, and there was not one among them whom she would care to ask to come in and keep her company. If his business should keep him away over night—it had done so the last

time he had gone to Chandlieu—then his wife would spend the night alone in the house. Fortunately she was not a nervous woman.

As they walked through into the kitchen he pulled out his large, old-fashioned turnip watch. It was ten minutes to twelve, and at twelve the motor lorry was to start from the Grande Place, down in front of the church.

They walked across the courtyard, and *le maître de céans*, as she sometimes fondly styled him, said something commendatory concerning the healthy condition of the orange trees; a condition which owed much to Madame Bissonet's careful washing of the orange leaves, and wise watering of the sturdy little shrubs. All their able-bodied gardeners had, of course, left Douvenay on the first day of war; and they had now only two old dodderers, who were more trouble than they were worth.

She unlocked the gate, and together they passed through into the roadway. There he bent and kissed her upturned face, and as he turned and started walking down the street, and as she watched his tall figure growing smaller, she told herself that Léon still looked a young and vigorous man, even in those aging black clothes he was wearing to-day. He had last worn them at the Mass which had been said for the soul of the first soldier from Douvenay fallen in the war; that was only six weeks ago, but Madame Bissonet had lost count of time, and it seemed much longer ago than that.

Slowly she went through into her own domain. Then turning round, she locked the great gate, which during the whole of her married life had always stood open, night as well as day, excepting during the *Vendanges*. During the merry days when the grapes are being gathered, the young folks are apt to get a little noisy and prudent householders shut and lock their gates.

The courtyard seemed very empty to Madame Bissonet, but when she went into the house, and the warm smell of some hot jam, simmering on her big steel *fourneaux*, met her nostrils, she felt less forlorn; also, emotion makes a healthy woman hungry, and Madame Bissonet began to feel that it would be pleasant to sit down and eat some *déjeuner*.

As she ate what Léon had left of the cold veal and the excellent mayonnaise sauce, she planned out her afternoon's work. Madame Bissonet never allowed the woman who came in for two hours each morning to help with the rough work of the house to enter the Prince's rooms; for she was shrewd enough to know that if she always did them herself, trouble was far less likely to arise. Both the Prince and his aides-de-camp were extraordinarily suspicious. They scented a spy, or at least a purveyor of information, in every woman, almost in every child, of Douvenay. It was a peculiarity which puzzled the Frenchwoman and made her feel a little contemptuous of her alien guests.

The afternoon went by, quietly, busily; and about

five o'clock she went out into the great nursery garden, now full of autumn scents and brilliant colouring. In normal times, this was the busiest fortnight of the year, but now there was, of course, nothing doing; and the two old men, who began their day's work at five in the morning, had gone home, aware that their employer was away. Madame Bissonet, who had taken with her a pair of garden shears, cut herself some of the late blooming roses. Then she went indoors again, and ate her solitary supper. She had not cared to cook a proper dinner for herself, as she would have done if her husband had been at home; she had only warmed up the *pot-au-feu*.

It was now that she yearned for her Léon's presence, and also, though she was a little ashamed of the fact, she missed the Prussian Prince, and the stir and bustle of his presence in the other half of the house.

When at last she did go up to bed, she did not fall at once into a sound, healthy sleep as she was wont to do. Instead she slipped off into fitful snatches of slumber, broken by anxious dreams; and for the first time for many years she dreamt of her youth.

Madame Bissonet had not always been in her present and secure position. She was now thirty-nine, and the first half of her life had been very unhappy; so unhappy indeed that she never willingly allowed her thoughts to go back to that time. But to-night, when she woke from that queer, vivid dream, painful old memories crowded in on her. Memories of a neglected, sordid childhood, spent with a foster-mother in one of

the poorer quarters of Paris; where, much too soon, she had learnt that she was nameless, fatherless and motherless; though both unknown father and mother were probably alive, for a good sum of money was paid monthly for her support. Then, when she was twelve years old, the payments had stopped, and she had been sent to a national industrial school. From there, four years later, into small service, as a *bonne à tout faire*, to an old childless couple who had finally bought a small house at Douvenay. Her prettiness and intelligence had endeared her to these people, and they had begged her to accompany them. Out of sheer good nature, she had said she would come and see how she liked the country.

And then a miracle happened. Léon Bissonet, the best looking, as well as the one eligible, bachelor in Douvenay, fell in love at first sight with the Parisians' pretty maid. He was then nine-and-twenty, she eighteen, and the struggle with his parents had lasted two whole years.

Under her bedclothes, under her fine linen sheet and light, warm blanket, Madame Bissonet clenched her hands as she remembered the fierce anger and surprise with which Léon's father and mother had learnt that their cherished son was courting, *pour le bon motif*, a penniless servant, instead of one of the two well-dowered girls on whom they had fixed their minds.

Even now, it is not easy for a Frenchman to marry without his parents' consent, and in those days, twenty-two years ago, it was almost impossible.

But Léon Bissonet, with his dogged, secretive, passionate nature, had achieved the impossible. And when they had given way, both father and mother, with characteristic French good sense, had taken their daughter-in-law to their hearts. Indeed, before her death, Madame Bissonet mère, as she had come to be called, acknowledged that her Léon could not have found a wife more suited to him; or one doing her duty better in the way of life to which she had been so surprisingly called. But not even she suspected how well the two were mated, and how deliciously close was that union, at once so selfish and so selfless, only known to elect lovers.

All through the next day, Madame Bissonet listened for the bell which should herald her husband's return. It was trying not to know, even to an hour, when he was coming back. But she remembered that last time he had had to sleep at Chandlieu.

The loneliness of that long day was only broken by the two brief calls of the Field Postman, bearing his usual mass of letters and parcels for the Prince.

The second night Madame Bissonet slept well and soundly, and she awoke with the happy belief that Léon would certainly come back to-day—Léon, and very probably the Prince also.

Once more she and the village woman cleaned and scrubbed what was already well scrubbed and cleaned; and all through the morning she concerned herself

with cooking one of those complicated, rather rich dishes in which the Champagne housewife delights. This was a hare *en giblotte*, which must be started early in the morning if it is to be really worth eating by noon. The advantage of this dish was that if Léon did not come till the afternoon it would be just as nice warmed up for his dinner as if served at mid-day. That thought consoled Madame Bissonet when the hour of *déjeuner* sped by without bringing her husband.

About one there came a note to La Maison Bissonet, stating that the Prince would be back that same afternoon, rather late. For a moment she was sorry, not for her own sake, but for Léon's. Léon would have liked a quiet night alone in their house. She choked down a sigh, and read again the formal message. It was typewritten, and Madame Bissonet, though she had seen examples of the work produced by "the writing-machine," as it is called in France, was yet sufficiently unfamiliar with it to look twice at the blue paper.

"Madame Bissonet is informed that his Highness, General-Prince Botho von Bedingen, will reach her house this afternoon about six o'clock."

At two o'clock Madame Bissonet went to her room. She lay down on her bed, for she wished to be well and lively this evening. She was rather surprised at herself, for she very seldom lay down in the daytime; but there seemed nothing left to do, and somehow she did not think her husband would be back before six o'clock.

He and the Prince would probably arrive much about the same time.

She had been asleep, how long? Half an hour, an hour, in deep, dreamless slumber, when she heard the bell above her gate clinging, rather insistently.

She leaped to the floor, and thrust her feet—she had small, pretty feet—into her slippers, and ran downstairs. Of course it was Léon—Léon at last!

And then she felt a pang of sharp disappointment. For it was not Léon after all. Instead of the Mayor of Douvenay's lean, virile figure, there stood outside the gate the stumpy form of the German Field-Postman, holding a bulky-looking parcel in his arms.

The poor old Landsturmer's face looked grey with fatigue. This was the third time he had been to her house that day, and Madame Bissonet told herself indignantly that those haughty Prussian officers down there, in the house on the Grande Place they used as headquarters, were cruelly uncaring of their men.

Madame Bissonet opened the gate a little way, and held out her arms for the parcel; for it was much too big and bulky to fit into her apron. Then she smiled, a trifle mechanically, for she felt heavy-hearted and tired herself. But there came no answering smile from Gustav Shenck, and filled with a sudden, kindly compunction, the Frenchwoman made the grey-clad soldier a quick sign to stay where he was. Laying the large parcel on the ground, she ran indoors, and brought him out a tumbler filled with the light, sweet



champagne which in those parts costs only a few pence a bottle.

He gulped it down to the last drop. And then his bulging, fat-rimmed eyes actually filled with tears, as he muttered "*Danke, dankel!*" and turned on his heel.

She stooped, picked up the parcel, brought it into her kitchen, and placed it on the table. Bending over it, she suddenly grew rather pink; she saw that it was addressed to "Madame Léon Bissonet, Maison Bissonet, Douvenay." And that, though there were stamped deeply on the spongy white paper which formed the covering, the various queer black marks of the German Army Field-Post.

Women are unreasonable creatures. Yesterday the fact that the Prince had remembered his promise would have given Madame Bissonet pleasure, but now, to-day, she felt a little vexed. For one thing, it had never occurred to her that he would go and buy her something in the way of wearing apparel; yet that was what he evidently had done. What she had half expected, what he had actually implied he would do, was to have a cake, made by his own cook, sent to her from far off Berlin. Madame Bissonet did not trust German taste, neither was she minded to accept a real present from the German General.

She looked around a little nervously, forgetting for the moment that the gate was locked. She hoped she would have time to undo the parcel, and put its contents away, before her husband came in.

In her haste she took up the long, keen-edged knife with which she had divided up the hare that morning; and which the woman, after cleaning it, had not put away. With it she cut the stout cords which bound the parcel, criss-cross wise.

And then, as she pushed back the stiff outer paper covering of her parcel, there came over Madame Bissonet a sick feeling of fear; for she had caught sight of a piece of stuff which was strangely like the lining of the coat which her husband had been wearing, when he left her two days ago.

With fingers which her brain had to drive to their easy task, for all sensation had left them, she removed the inner sheet of paper. . . .

Yes—there was no mistake possible now. Neatly folded, in as small a bulk as was possible, were her husband's clothes. The coat, arranged queerly inside out, lay on the top; under it were the waistcoat, the trousers, the braces, the collar too, and his black tie. The shirt, however, was lacking, and so were Léon's boots and socks, and his tall hat.

She began lifting the things, one after the other, to that part of the kitchen table which was clear, and suddenly she espied, pinned to the trousers, a piece of paper. It was folded, and when she unfolded it she saw that it was covered with several lines of type-writing; just as had been the message she had received concerning the Prince's return. But this time the superscription was slightly different in its wording,

for what ran across the top lefthand corner of that oblong piece of paper read:

MADAME VEUVE BISSONET,  
Maison Bissonet,  
Douvenay.

What a strange, what a horrible mistake, for some stupid German Landsturm clerk to have made! Still, she waited a moment before she forced her eyes to read the lines which ran below that incorrect address:

“Madame, you are informed that your spouse, Léon Bissonet, Mayor of Douvenay, was found to have concealed about his person a letter addressed to a woman in Paris, giving information as to the whereabouts of General Prince Botho von Bedingen and his Staff. He was court-martialled last night, September 28th, condemned to death, and duly executed this morning, September 29th. He was buried in his shirt. His hat has been mislaid, his boots and socks have been requisitioned for a French civilian prisoner. Herewith please find the rest of his garments. His watch, and the money found on his person, will be returned to you in due course.”

Madame Bissonet was still staring down at the piece of paper in her hand when there came a stir, the sound of two motors stopping in the street outside, and a confused babel of laughter and talk.

The bell rang—an insistent, impatient peal. But the woman standing in the kitchen of La Maison Bis-

sonet did not stir. She stayed exactly where she was, and not a muscle moved. Again the bell above the locked gate rang out, very loudly this time, as if strong, eager hands were tugging at the steel chain-pull outside.

Suddenly she let go the piece of paper, and it fluttered on to the floor. Then she put out a hand which trembled convulsively and stroked her husband's coat.

There was a pause, a long, long pause, and then there burst on her ears queer, scrambling sounds, and then a thud. This meant that some one had been hitched up on to the wall by the side of the gate, and slipping down the roof of one of the outbuildings, had jumped down into the courtyard.

A moment later the Prince's body-servant, a young Coburger, with whom Madame Bissonet had always been on friendly terms, opened wide the kitchen door.

He stared at the woman within with slow-growing astonishment. Though unobservant, as all young, happy, prosperous people are unobservant, he yet felt amazed to see the change that three days had wrought to Madame Bissonet's appearance. She no longer looked pretty, or even healthy. Her eyes were blood-shot, her face white with a dreadful pallor, and though her lips moved, she did not speak.

He told himself that something had evidently upset her. Short as was that youth's experience of war, he had seen many amazing things in the last few weeks, and now his business was to unlock the gate.

"The key!" he said hurriedly. "The key, Madame! His Highness is outside, and has already waited too long."

She fumbled blindly at her waist, and at last handed him the key.

A moment later, the noises caused by a number of men clattering across the courtyard penetrated Madame Bissonet's brain. She knew, subconsciously, that they were making their way to the front door of the house. But all that was left working of her shattered mind was set on remembering the exact wording of the letter which had been written in such careless haste, and which, against his better judgment, she had made her husband take with him to Chandlieu. Yes, she remembered now that she had written down the fact of this Prussian Prince-General being in their house. It was that one sentence which had made her Léon's murderess.

And then there came over the distraught woman an intense, scarcely sane, hatred of Prince Botho von Bedingen. As in a flash, there came back to her something he had said with a jovial laugh only this last week. A French aeroplane had come whirling overhead, and he had exclaimed: "It's a good thing for you, Madame, that our friend up there does not know that a Prussian General and his Staff is in La Maison Bissonet, or there would soon not be much left of your house!"

Unseen by him, she had shaken her head gaily, for Madame Bissonet had never set on her courteous enemy

the exaggerated military value he had evidently set on himself, and which she now believed had been the determining cause of—her brain refused to finish the sentence.

A shadow fell athwart the kitchen, and turning round, she saw the Prince's burly form filling up the doorway. He was laughing, that round, guttural laugh, which Germans laugh; and he came forward and stood inside the kitchen, all unknowing of the hideous tragedy in which he had been an unknowing participant.

"Well, Madame, I hope you have something good for my dinner! I have missed your cooking the last three days, and——" Madame Bissonet never knew that what the Prince was going to say was simply: "and I hear your husband has been away. If I had known that, I would have picked him up when driving through Chandlieu and brought him home," for when he began speaking, she with her right hand behind her back, had been stealthily feeling under the stiff, rustling paper for the long, pointed knife with which she had cut the string of her parcel. . . .

As the Prince uttered the word "and" she whipped her hand round and sprang at him with a hoarse, vengeful cry of rage and anguish.

So sudden, so forceful, was the impact that he was sent reeling back against the wall; and the two men who rushed into the kitchen a few moments later were put to it to withdraw the knife from out the frightful wound.

Going on for two years now, Madame Bissonet has been confined in the criminal lunatic asylum at Zell, Hanover. But she is within sight of the end of her troubles, for very soon she will be quite mad.





# BACK O' THE YARDS

BY

WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT AND  
H. A. STURTZEL

(By Mr. Comfort)

THE BLACK COAT—*Every Week*

CHAUTONVILLE—*The Masses*

FLEMING THE TWICE-BORN—*Every Week*

THE SHIELDING WING—*Hearst's Magazine*



## XI

### BACK O' THE YARDS

**T**HE brickyards, I mean. It's a jungle-patch between the stockyards and the Larcher Street limit—this "back o' the yards." Healy's Gardens is the Capitol and Square of the district.

Things happen in Healy's Gardens. Hundreds of unnaturalised Irish from the bogs work in the brickyards; hundreds of not-to-be-naturalised "Hunkeys" work in the stockyards. Added to this, all the bastard and mongrel float of the world's crucible swarm the choked dwelling districts between.

Every Saturday night when the men are paid, Healy's Gardens becomes the corral of a thousand Huns, hell-bent from the killing pens, and a horde of Irish vandals from the brick-kilns. Then things pop. But Buck Healy, who used to be a "tub gambler on the Isthmus," is a wise man. He sees to it that the "Hunkeys" and the "Tyros" have their special fireworks on separate nights.

There was a big official "Hunkey" dance in progress on this particular night, and the "Dreamer" was there. This was Pronto Kid Ladue. They called him the "Dreamer"—the Polish girls and the big mottled butterflies that hung around Healy's—because of his

languorous disinterest in everything, their fairness in particular. The Kid was a card. He had recently come in from 'Frisco and was a past welter-king of the squared-circle, for the present laid up with a slow-mending wrist. He had money, but something about Annulka Street and the Gardens had called him from the first. The Kid was inclined to be on the rim of things—in touch with the outposts of law and civilisation. In 'Frisco you'd have found him around Russian Hill or Meigg's Wharf; in Seattle, out to the "Jungles"; in New York around Leverette, if not in Chinatown. Here, the Kid found his own "back o' the yards."

Ladue had ideas about women. One would have marked him for a "hater" to see his papal armature against feminine shafts from all quarters. He was attentive and at the same time impartial—fascinating in his aloofness—one who had lived to the last ditch. So the little Polish girls from the packing plant stamped their feet at the Kid and called him "Dreamer." One day Tim Whalen, Healy's chief bouncer, asked the Kid why he hung off.

"When I crossbows with a plume," Ladue told him, "it's a glowworm—an eighteen-carat butterfly with yellow eyes or nothin'. None of your corn-fed, timothy-janes for mine."

Nor did the floating particles of the social swim interest the fighter. These were the "grey moths" in the Kid's argot.

On this particular night there was special reason for

Ladue's presence. It was to see the wind-up of a certain Slovak affair, which brings us to Jan Karlukson.

Jan Karlukson was a night hammerman in the stockyards, and also the king of Annulka Street—a street of a thousand cheap and exactly identical frame shacks wherein live the bulk of the stockyards employees—street of a thousand phonographs—the hub of Packingtown, the very buckle of the jungle-belt, “back o’ the yards.” Karlukson ruled Annulka Street with a hand of iron and the law of fear—a great blond, taciturn giant, part Norse and part Polc, with a hard hand and a harder face. A seething volcano lived in Karlukson. He was dangerous when sober, treacherous when drunk; a slow-moving fighter of the cold Scandinavian type, with a pale blue eye, like light glinting on ice. Karlukson chewed and smoked at the same time. When he opened his mouth it was no place for our kind of women and children. It was the Norse blood in him that overtrod the more docile Huns and made him the big noise of the Street.

Between Jan Karlukson and Tim Whalen, there was a deep grudge. Whalen, a “strong-arm” from the water-fronts of the East, was Healy’s pride, the only bouncer he had secured with class enough to hold his job over two pay-days. It was said that Whalen had done his term in “stir” for killing a man with his bare hands. Buck Healy put out a certain yardman’s cocktail called a “tin roof.” It was raw and it was red-hot—a Louisiana rot-gut blent with vodka,

five fingers high. "White men" never drank the stuff, but through Healy's coaching, the Huns from the slaughter-house had learned to cry for it. Now and again the lid blew off, in spite of the precautions of Tim Whalen.

On the night of the last official "Hunkey" dance, the Hammerman and the Bouncer had come to grips. Karlukson, who had taken on a supercargo of "tin roofs," had gripped a "lady" too hard in the open, and had been ejected by one quick, cat-like rush of Whalen's. Furthermore, in the back entry-way Whalen had dealt the big Norse a straight-arm in a place that counted, then locked the door. Karlukson had recovered in the alley, and gone home—without saying a word. That was absolutely inhuman, when one knew Jan Karlukson.

Later, however, talk began to drift along the Street and about Gile's Bar, at the corner of Larcher and Annulka, that Karlukson had been brooding silent for a fortnight, and that he had sworn to cut out the heart of Tim Whalen and put it back in a different place. Thus things had been brewing, and for two weeks past all Packingtown had been waiting and watching for the night when Big Jan liquored up for the surgery.

On this night all the packing girls and the wrapping girls, and every driver and "killer" along the Street was out in his brightest barbaric. Among the late-comers, as the Kid had expected, were Jan Karlukson and his clique. At the door they met Whalen's *looker*,

who told them Whalen's orders, which were that Karlukson was not to step inside the limits of Healy's for a month. But Karlukson and his crowd butted right past, dropping their half-dollars in the box, then losing themselves in the crowd. It wasn't a minute before the *looker* tipped Whalen off.

Now the Bouncer had the shoulders of a piano-mover, the thighs of a troglodyte, but it was only "development." Karlukson was ingrained; slim beside Whalen, but of the fibre of a man who works with his back ten hours a day and is hard to the ligaments. No one knew this better than the natural fighter, Kid Ladue, who was there to watch.

Whalen was not looking hard for Karlukson this night, but the Hammerman, after a dozen of Healy's raw, began looking for the Bouncer—sighted him across the hall. Whalen saw him coming and also saw a job that needed tending to at the other end of the floor.

Karlukson and his crowd stayed on, and began a night's session. When the Hammerman took to deep drinking it was not for an evening's performance. The enormous overstrung vitality did not appear to be deadened by stimulants. Some devil in his brain awakened and looked out. At five in the morning the dance broke up, but still the group in the back-room sat on. The Fighting Kid had no intention of leaving before action. He had been devoting himself to Whalen in order to keep in touch—interested as only a fighter can be. The Bouncer's talk jumped a bit, and his

hands wouldn't exactly behave. The Kid knew the signs, but rather despised him. It was the intolerable patience of the Hammerman that was shattering his enemy's nerve.

At eight next morning, Healy himself appeared and was tipped off to the Slovak crowd. He called Whalen out of a two hours' sleep. The Kid, who was in the offing, heard him ball blue fire out of his bouncer.

Of the rest, Ladue was an eye witness.

Karlukson was sitting at a table with his back to the wall. Four of his lot were in commission. Every man still on his legs drank when Karlukson drank, or fought. Karlukson was still flush. He had been waiting for Whalen for ten hours. When the door opened, he slumped back in his seat as if inert, the pale fishy-blue eyes took on a glazed look, fastened on the opposite wall. Whalen had entered and approached softly. Then he roared out . . .

Karlukson stared stonily at the other until a hand shot out to jerk him upright. Ladue couldn't quite follow the two tawny arms of the Hammerman that now gripped Whalen's shoulders. There was a stifled curse from Whalen, who could neither grip Karlukson nor draw away. He was held rigid. The ring-master, Ladue, was puzzled for a moment.

Slowly, inexorably the back of the big bouncer was bent at the waist, backward and down, his two arms held slightly crooked and behind. Down to the level of the table he was forced, the cold heavy blue eyes of the Hammerman changeless upon his writhing features,



without feeling, without hate—the dead, passionless stare of an avenger. It was as if by sheer brooding Karlukson had brought this moment about. It had the look of being ordained—and so fully anticipated that it brought not even a flush of victory to the Hammerman's eyes.

Kid Ladue heard plainly the snap, then the hoarse moan from Whalen, as he crumpled up on the floor. It was the only sound of the struggle. Karlukson put out his boot. Like a broken reed the other lay across it and was spurned away. Then the Hammerman collapsed in his chair. The great tawny head sank forward on the chest. The break had come. A sneer touched Ladue's lips. His admiration had gone out to Karlukson at first, but now it was spoiled. Both men had been in rotten condition. . . . They carried the Hammerman home to his shack in Annulka Street and Whalen to the stockyards hospital. That was the last Healy's Gardens ever saw of this Bouncer.

The woman was Karlukson's woman. The first glimpse Ladue got of her was on the night after the fight in the back-room. It was in the cool of the evening and he was sitting out with a friend on the front steps of his little boarding hutch, as he called it, down on Annulka. Ladue was fogging one of his favorite "phoebes" and telling his friend some of the "mills" he'd been through, back at the Gate before his wrist went. On the porch alongside, a couple of yardsmen were sitting on the steps, their hands hang-

ing over their knees, their eyes blank and staring—saying nothing, thinking nothing, feeling nothing, but “all in.” The other porch to the left was draped with a giant Pole, lying half in a chair, half across the low railing, his head thrown back and snoring like a grade-tractor.

It struck the Kid at the time that a sculptor chap couldn't have pulled off anything better in clay under the title, “The Spirit of the Yards.” He mentioned the same to his friend. If you see this picture, you've got Annulka.

It was darker now and the women were beginning to trail along the Street, when a commotion in one of the houses near by broke out. A high-pitched voice in English, a woman's voice—pleading, on the verge of a scream. Then she was running out of her house—the gigantic Karlukson behind. Ladue heard her whimper as the Hammerman clapped her to his chest. His hand cut off her breath. She was thrust bodily within. A laugh ran through the dusk.

The Kid had arisen. Men and women on the porches made light of the affair; though there was nervous laughter all round. Something had boiled up in the Kid. The woman had been of astonishing quality, even in that trying glimpse.

The big Pole with the snore, arose, stretched, and ambled off down the Street towards Gile's Bar. Soon Karlukson emerged and disappeared in the same direction. He was “going on,” for his was a night-job in the killing pens.

Somehow Ladue didn't find any words the rest of that evening. Later he took a turn with his friend to the corner. He caught a glimpse of Karlukson's woman in the doorway, standing in the dusk in a light kimono of some sort, low-necked and clinging. There was something pale and shimmery about the picture, her face distinct, the full lips and eyes gleaming, even in that half-light. She seemed to beckon.

Something of the women of Rome and Pompeii, a bit of the fulness of the Island beauty about her. Without designating, the Kid got the feel of this. She watched him intently, even came out to look after him as he passed. There was a queer draw to the whole thing, and it got to Ladue. He was not himself, as he said good-night to his friend. Somehow he seemed to belong to a woman like that, waiting for him in the dusk.

It took this much to challenge the Kid—his kind of a woman—a flame. He went out after her. She was on the porch when he went back.

They sat together on her porch. . . . Now and then each would steal a covert glance at the other, half appraising, but always their eyes dropped simultaneously. It was like a fear. It was not because of any shame; it was no abashment of youth; it was because of the too-deep understanding that had sprung up like a presence between them. Even Ladue was afraid to meet the long look.

They had little to say. The Kid smoked many cigarettes in the new tension that had come over him.

He was feeling something of it all now—the big strange streak in her.

Suddenly he turned squarely on the woman, determination in his eyes. She did not turn, but he saw the quiver under her chin and he smiled to himself. A little breath of the night breeze had brought a faint and delicate scent to his nostrils. . . .

Soon after, he left, but the next evening he came again to the porch, and the next. She had begun to dress for his coming. He had not been slow to catch that. This third night her hair was done in two soft little pads that came down across her forehead, a crown in the dusk for her beauty. It might have been done for a lover's eyes. He noted the taste of the cameo she wore at the V of her waist. She was more daring. She swiftly turned her face, meeting his eyes full. He grinned, almost tauntingly. A full moment he held those wonderful Egyptian eyes, great yellow eyes, full of strange and conflicting lights—like far countries that stir and call to a man.

Somewhere a baby cried. A woman was singing, a foreign song, that gave a strange sad sense of the peasant spirit, ignorant, trampled, unawakened. Down the Street a red glare was lighting up the sky from the yard furnaces—the burning of the entrails. The wind favoured, and the man thanked his stars.

From the boarding-house adjoining came the scraping of chairs, the clatter of dishes being snatched from table—and a half-dozen men thumped out and shambled past in the direction of the Gardens.

"Cattle!" said Ladue. "Off for the rum-shops." She nodded indifferently. "I suppose."

"But there's nothing else to do around here," he added, watching her face.

She did not turn to him, but he knew her thoughts.

An outbreak of screaming from a child next door—a woman trying to still it with the abominable chatter of the Galician. Ladue felt her wrestling with her pride.

"How long have you weathered this?" he asked suddenly.

"Two years," she answered.

"Two years," he repeated slowly. "Two years in this. Karlukson earns big money. Why don't you get out?"

"He doesn't want to. It suits him, so he stays."

"And you're bound to stick to him, I suppose." He lifted his brows insolently. "Bonds of home and all that. . . . How often does Karlukson practice those cave-tactics?"

She flashed a glance of quick hatred at him. The Kid loved even that, the small fury of it, but he only laughed into her face in the arrogance of deep insight. He liked to see her blaze. The tides of youth were strong within her. Her eyes dropped again.

"What tactics?"

"That strong-arm stuff three nights ago?"

"Oh, not so often," she returned coldly.

"Some one is liable to drop him like a mad dog on one of his expeditions."

"Karlukson is a big man. He does what he pleases on this street. No one would dare come after Karlukson."

There was pride in her voice.

"Wouldn't they?" he asked.

"No." She shot a quick glance at him, then added dully, "Besides, it was nothing. Karlukson wouldn't hurt me."

He was beginning to get a line on her now. Hers was a savage animal passion, the gay, giaour love of Spain and the Orient. Her kind of womanhood yearned to be captured by force. He imagined the pride that would be hers to instil a man with enough ardour to drag her away by the hair, fling her in some cellar, to have and to hold against the world. His own passion quickened on the moment. It was a challenge.

He said bluntly: "Karlukson's a brute and a bull," and again leaned back smiling into her face. He knew his power. But it was her presence that liberated him.

"You don't know Karlukson," she whispered suddenly. "Karlukson is my man. That wasn't Karlukson that came home to me three nights ago. The Yards did that—work did that. Karlukson works and works until the beast gets into him—the animals in the Yards get into him and he goes to the Gardens to forget. But the Karlukson I met three years ago wasn't like that. He was a master steel-worker then, and the best man on the job. He was always that. He offered me everything in life I hadn't had. I was

all froze-in on myself. He made me a queen. But he grew tired——”

“Uses you for a chopping-block, eh?”

She blazed at him again, and there was tense silence before she put in:

“It was work again. Karlukson has worked like a beast—a cog!”

“And in the meantime you’ve been getting along, buried here in this jungle. Mighty near the dead-line now, aren’t you?” he suggested.

Her face burned as from a lash.

“A couple more years of it, in this——!” he added. “Think of it. And you a regular!”

Even in that there was appraisal.

She was looking off toward the red in the sky again. Suddenly he drew her to him and kissed her mouth. She showed fight, but her eyes smouldered with passion as well as fury. . . . They sat back an instant gazing into each other’s eyes, arms tense between, each holding the other back.

“Look here, you’re a flame! Do you know it? I want you—I want you bad! You make a giant out of me—just your touch. Can’t you see it? I could do anything with you. I’m going to have you!”

“How’ll you get me?” she answered. Her eyes contracted and she elevated her chin scornfully. He had felt the pull of her beauty, but never as now. She was smooth as a vase in the dusk. She returned the menace in his eyes with a dare. Ladue thought he read her like a scroll, and the dusk lent magic to it all. He felt now

that she feared him. A smile which he misinterpreted, flashed across her face, her eyes turned up over his shoulder. Was Karlukson in her thoughts? Yet her breast heaved with real emotion. He knew that her woman's art had long been disengaged; that she was drawn to him; that her heart was sick of the frowsy monotony of Annulka Street. He drew her close again. Her small hands pushed and beat against his breast, her fingers wound in his hair, but her smoky eyes beckoned him on. Again and again he pressed her to him.

"Let me go!" she cried in a low furious voice, half a laugh.

A moment longer he held her, making her feel his wondrous bounding vitality, in which lay coiled up fights, scores of fights, hundreds of those glorious moments. And he told her with his eyes that he would never tire, never dull. He had lived; he had learned her life better than she had learned it.

"Shall I let you go?" he whispered through a laugh.

For answer she covered herself in his coat, her arms around his neck. Her eyes looked into his, a yellow glare in the dusk, and his looked back, unwinking. . . . Then, as suddenly as she had flung herself at him she had broken away, turned, and sped through the doorway and up the dark stairs.

He followed, making no sound on the stair, taking four steps at a time. She was quicker. Almost in his face, a lock snapped—her room door.

Softly he tried the knob, then pushed his weight



against the panel. It was firmly locked. A moment he waited.

"Anna!" he called softly. "Anna!"

No answer.

He listened. There was no sound within, yet he knew she was there. He had a picture of her there in the dark, looking at the red out of her window with a cruel little smile on her face. She was larger than he thought.

He went down the stairs, sat on the porch, lit a cigarette and waited. . . . He smiled to himself. He knew that every moment was breaking her now. Soon she would come back to him, humble and dejected.

In the interval a man stepped from a house down the row, passed along the walk, and repassed, scrutinising Ladue intently through the dark. He was a little man of ape-like proportions and the unfinished face and offensive moustache of the Galician. A moment he called Ladue out of his thoughts. Somewhere he had seen the fellow. Then it came to him—one of the Karlukson crowd in Healy's back-room.

A moment later the woman was sitting beside him again. She said nothing, but looked away.

He fell back to the commonplace now, feeling her confusion. He began telling her of the old days in the ring, back in 'Frisco—days of big games and big money, in the eye of the world. He was different as he talked—the impetuous boy came out, full of enthusiasm and impulse. The feel of it thrilled her anew.

"And it's all coming back again," he finished, hold-

ing up the wrist with the leather splint. "This'll be all set in another two weeks, good as new."

He turned to her, impetuously, laying a hand on hers.

"Say, why don't you come out with me? God, how we'd live—travelling together, out in the world! We could keep going or stay awhile, just as we liked——"

"And when you got tired?" she put in, mockingly.

"I wouldn't. . . . Say, what do you see in that bull, anyhow? There's nothing to hold you. He's got nothing for you now. Why don't you break away and live?"

She did not answer.

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" he turned on her. "I'm coming to get you—hear me? I'm coming to take you—— I'll take you the way he took you. He did that—now, didn't he?"

She nodded faintly.

"Well, I'm coming. You think I can't? . . . I'm not a bull, but I'm going to show you."

He sat back and felt the pride that flushed her.

A week passed. Always away from her came the doubt,—the memory of her laugh in the dusk, the feel of the little demons that lived within her. And always the Kid was aware of some secret supervision from the houses surrounding. But never for an instant did he drop the conquest. There were times when he felt his own power. Sometimes he felt that all that had lain dormant in her had awakened and was singing.

He talked of cities, of magnolias and soft smoky nights in the south Islands, of winter seasons in Europe and the coast of South America, of the ring-life he had known. He told her what life held for her kind of creature if she would break free. He explained how he had almost used himself up in the trades before he had developed the fighter in himself. How he hated the trades! They were the treadmills that made cogs out of big and potent men. The trades silenced the call of the world and the quest in a man, and when that was silenced, a fellow was down and done. He asked her only to look about her at the dwellers of Annulka Street for the cogs. Would she remain in the grime and fog of it all, without even a struggle to break away?

The woman listened, and the night breeze became the breath of all that gay, bizarre life she had known before Karlukson came.

"But suppose I got tired of you?" she would say after long intervals of silence. "What then?"

Fine egotism pulsed through him like wine.

"Hell, you wouldn't be hurt any, would you? And you'd be out of this, wouldn't you? Isn't it worth the risk? Let's be square. We might either of us get tired, but isn't it worth the game anyhow? There's nothing big coming to any one without a risk. Think of it—we two—doing Europe together, and the big coast cities of South America—until you did get tired. I wouldn't kick if you did. I wouldn't hold you. But maybe you never would. Maybe I never would. And

there's nothing to lose. You know that. Life with me couldn't come to this, whatever happened. I'll take my chance. Won't you?"

The boy, serious, unpretentious, came to the surface now as he took her face between his two hands and kissed her tenderly. . . . This was different from ever before, and she surrendered her face to him.

As he left that night he looked back to see if she were watching. There was a white filmy figure just withdrawing from the doorway. He laughed softly and whistled to himself. But later again, he couldn't get the lines running all straight.

One night, at last, he came early, before dusk, and the leather splint was no longer on his wrist. Joyously like a boy, he showed the woman the new sound hand, beating the wrist with the back of the other to show that it was solid. She laughed at his ardour.

"To-morrow——" he said, as they sat down in the little parlour. "To-morrow's Saturday. To-morrow I'm coming to take you, do you hear? Take you from him and pay for you in his own kind of money."

She nodded and said nothing, looking away over the city.

An hour passed in glory. Everything that she did pleased him.

A short silence was broken by a step on the outer porch and a light knock. The peering animal face of the little Galician with the moustache was thrust in the doorway. The woman stepped out. A few sentences were exchanged in Slovak, then the woman came

back in the house to search for something. It was something Karlukson wanted. The woman was nervous and Ladue knew that there would be trouble if he stayed.

He stayed.

They did not fall into talk after that. The hot August night, starless, breathless, portended storm. The air was dead and sultry and bore down upon them as if the city were being smothered under the hollowed palm of an angry god. Out of the window the yard furnaces glared up into the sky, fitfully. Down at the corner of Larcher, the echo of downtown millions yelped in their ears.

"Come on," said the man presently. "I can't breathe here. Come outside. There's a little joint down the Street where we can talk and be cool."

With proud obeisance she went to her room for her wraps. The man waited in the shadows of the sitting-room. Downtown still came to him in low rumblings. Somehow there was a breath of expectancy in the oppressive air. He arose and stood waiting at the foot.

Ten minutes elapsed before her white dress gleamed at the head of the stairs. There she stopped short, and the man heard her catch her breath, then remain as if frozen. Something crawled along his spine; he whirled and confronted Jan Karlukson standing huge, silent and shadowy in the doorway.

Ladue did not know whether the Hammerman had been standing there for minutes, or had just stepped

into the doorway. It was like the Killer to come in silently. Another creeper went up the Kid's back. Here was bull and cat combined.

A full minute the two confronted, the woman watching from above. In all the times the Kid had seen him, the Hammerman had said no word. It was so now; it was ruin to weak nerves, the same that Whalen had known. A quick movement and the key clicked in the lock of the front door. Karlukson advanced. Queerly the Kid heard the hiss of the woman's breath above.

Only the lurid lights of the yard furnaces lit the room, as the two manœuvred, brushing against furniture, speaking no word. Twice Karlukson rushed to be played aside by the Kid. Plainly it was the aim of the Killer to break his man with bare hands—Whalen-fashion. Not a blow did he strike, only came on patiently, the huge arms reaching out to pluck Ladue to him.

With a quick turn the Kid flung open the back door and stepped out. Every foot of the cramped room was an advantage to the bigger man and Karlukson followed into the open. Then began the fight in the jumping red light of the furnaces, that flung their shadows, grotesque and misshapen upon the ground.

"There's nothing but a finish in this," was what kept running through the Kid's head. "No throwing up the sponge. This is a stake fight to a finish. Somebody's going to be spoiled."

There, between the walls of the high board fence

that shut in the back yard—a fence that might have been the stockade walls of one of the killing-pens in the yards, they rushed each other—two men in a certain glory of youth and strength, with naked fists, with the mania to maim, to destroy. All the tortured æons of human gains in the upward climb through evolution were erased in that first half-minute. Evolution itself was lost. This was involution, rather, hideous reversion. Not even a man-made light guided their movements. The fitful red of the furnaces might have been the belching from some distant crater throwing its light on their midnight struggle—two cave-men of the stone age. Lower they sank into the primal dregs of the Beginnings, striving, blindly, elementally, as antipodal atoms strive in a chemist's crucible. And the woman had come and was standing big-eyed and silent in the low doorway, finishing the savage picture—its Cause.

The Kid would not be caught. Intermittently he was participant and spectator. It was like a bit of a moving-picture film, as he suffered and toiled and sweated, colliding, recoiling, whirling, the picture broken only by exultation when he felt his knuckles smash home.

Voices arose from the houses and yards surrounding, and heads began popping over the board fence. Presently the Kid was aware that the yard was filling with men, foreigners, babbling excitably in the detestable high-pitched Slovak of the Street. It was like a gathering of foul birds to watch the end of a fight.

The Hammerman was hurt and puzzled. He could not use his fists, depended upon the sheer power of his crushing arms. But his enemy was as quick as a leopard and punished him again and again from the Unseen. . . . Karlukson began striking out, great lumbrous blows. It was what Ladue had wanted, the rage that blinds and tires itself out.

"Muscle-bound!" the Kid voiced between his teeth after the first minute. "They all are, that handle the hammer."

Karlukson's movements were ponderous. It was as if he were deformed by his own strength.

The crowd was quiet—awed.

It may have been the utter unreliability of a man who knows nothing of the game, but the fact was Karlukson put one ripping wallop across. Ladue's cheek was laid open to the bone. There were mutters of amazement. Karlukson with his bare knuckles had done this. Ladue was drenched with his own blood. A sound from the woman in the doorway was like the cry of a devil. The watchers muttered crazily. The Kid gave no sign.

. . . Some one was edging nearer the Hammerman, admonishing. Ladue made out the squat figure of the little Galician. Suddenly the Kid was like a thing of terror that bore down on the bystanders, and upon the sneak in their midst who had been trying to hand Karlukson something from the rear.

"Get back!" he called hoarsely. "Keep out of this, all of you! This is my scrap, hear me? You, you



little sneakin' ape—out of the yard, or I'll beat you to death!"

The crowd shrank back. The two fought on, through dragging exhaustion and back to second-wind again.

And now the crowd of animals, its lust sated, jabbered with fear at what it saw. Karlukson towered backward and forward, a monster out of whose features all likeness to a man had been beaten.

An endless purgatory of red mist—a loud snap of bone and the right hand of the Kid dropped to his side. The newly-knit wrist gone again. Giving his face and head to a dozen blows, Karlukson had done it, had caught the Kid's arm and twisted it back. Everybody heard it and knew. The Hammerman was waiting for another grip that would end it. The crowd surged forward, but Ladue parried on, the Fighter uprisen in his heart—beyond fear and feeling now.

With one hand, he punched on, unfolding the last coils of his vitality through immeasurable lapses of time, only once in an age jerking back for an instant, knowing his blow had gone home. The hideous bloody gargoyle before him still came on, with mouthings and gibbers now—death on the face—death that the Kid saw—that his own hands had wrought—but why didn't he fall?

The Kid's fist sank into Karlukson's neck. There was the loose snapping of jaws that meant paralysis. Ladue braced his eyes open, steeled himself and followed up the blow with another. Then he was dimly

aware that the great bulk was sinking slowly to its knees. Again and again he followed his lead, battering the head and neck of the other. And next moment the Hammerman was stretched out on the ground, and Ladue was swaying over him on shaky legs, clutching the air for support and saying over and over again:

“I got him. I got him with my bare hands!”

The pale blue eye of the Hammerman jerked him back. It seemed filled with ancient wisdom. It seemed as if the brain of Karlukson worked now as it never had done when he lived and moved. . . .

Something behind Ladue, a rustle and the sharp burn like a scald, in the centre of his back—a knife.

The “Dreamer” slipped to the ground, without a sound, his head on his arms. He was down and done now, and it was not the Pole, but the woman—who had done it. One wonders if he got that last picture—the woman in white, kneeling, her arms about the neck of the Hammerman, her hair falling about the face of that ruin.

# THE END OF THE GAME

BY

WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

AUTHOR OF

A PRINCESS PASSING—*Ladies' Home Journal*

THE DRYAD OF REOUW STRAITS—*Everybody's  
Magazine*

THE FIGHT IN BUDDHA'S CAULDRON—*Everybody's  
Magazine*

SOLDIERS, SAND AND A BIT OF SENTIMENT—*Harper's  
Magazine*



## XII

### THE END OF THE GAME

**E**IGHT tedious hours after the signal was flown from the Peak, the sweating carrier came shuffling up the long dark flight of stone stairs, and dumped our English mail upon a table. With thumping hearts and sparkling eyes we sorted it carefully, in a pathetic attempt at casualness. Then, stretching out in our long chairs, with the warm breeze sweeping over us, fresh from the blue Gulf of Aden, we were completely lost to each other, wrapped in dreams of home.

Two hours later, our letters having been read and re-read and carefully laid aside for another reading, we were still at the mail, wallowing in the newspapers, and gradually emerging from our earlier abstraction.

"Hello," grunted Eric from the depths of the *London Times*, "that's rotten."

I glanced over my paper at him. He read aloud:

"'The Last Battle of the Foreign Legion.' This ought to interest you."

My mind was wandering; I merely blinked at him.

"The Foreign Legion," he repeated impatiently. "The Foreign Legion. Surely you've heard of the Foreign Legion? Well, it's done for . . . wiped out

on the western front. I'll let you have the article when I'm finished. It's jolly interesting." And he buried himself once more between the sheets.

Aroused from my previous abstraction, but still half dreaming, I gazed languidly over the white-hot, ugly, roofs of Aden across the Bay to the Arabian shore, where the Turkish lines could be plainly seen; and tried vaguely to recall some elusive memory that associated me with the Foreign Legion. It was not in Europe, nor in Algiers, nor . . . All of a sudden it flashed upon me. In an instant I was swept clear across Asia, all the way to Kwangsu, back to the day—that really could not have been so very long ago—when I stepped outside my compound gate just as Stanley was stepping down from a palanquin.

Pensive and surly with enforced loneliness, I was elbowing my way through the reeking crowd, when the palanquin halted, a panel slid back, and an Englishman stood before me. By his well-cut tweeds and light raincoat, flung carelessly on his arm, he was plainly English; but his skin was tan and weather-beaten; his eyes a sombre brown with that furtive, quizzical expression that comes from living under an over-bright sky; and his moustache was marred by a nervous habit of biting his upper lip.

After a moment's hesitation he offered me his hand, with an embarrassed smile.

"How do you do? You received my message? I'm Stanley."

"Oh," I said, trying to restrain my surprise, "you're

Stanley." And I shook hands rather gravely, for he was supposed to be two hundred miles out in the hills of Shantung. Still, I was pleased to see him. I had always had a strong desire to meet him.

It was a strange fact that although he was working in my district, taking instructions from me, we neither had the slightest idea of the other's character, our correspondence being strictly limited, on my part to precise instructions, and, on his part, to terse neat reports. Judging by these reports, his work seemed to me entirely satisfactory; but at the same time there seemed to be something lacking about the man's character. The Chinese, who had known him before my arrival in the district, qualified the few remarks they made about him with dubious shrugs.

His unexpected appearance placed me in an awkward position, for I wanted, of course, to be completely hospitable; and yet I certainly had to find out why he deserted his post in Shantung. This was difficult, as it was our first meeting; he was considerably older than I; and I saw much in him to make his friendship desirable.

We walked toward the compound, pressing through the noisy mob that closed about us, hawkers shrieking in our ears, solemn-faced babies playing under our very legs, and whining beggars plucking at our elbows,—without exchanging more than a few casual comments about local conditions. He made no explanation of his arrival, simply stating that he had left his interpreter, Pan Erh, with a string of laden carts, out in Shantung.

When we reached my room, bleak and bare though it was, he looked about with an expression that was almost hungry; and then settled back in the long wicker chair by the stove with an air of contentment. But I could not help noticing that he kept drumming nervously with his fingers, and when he laughed, it was a short low laugh, and almost querulous.

Finally I blurted out, with an air of facetiousness:

"What's the idea of the surprise-party, Stanley? Get tired of millet gruel? . . . or . . . or what?"

"Why," he said, with a short laugh, and a quick look at me that had a shade of defiance in it, "I thought you knew. I'm discharged . . . sacked . . . put on the beach."

I was astonished and confused; and stammered out a hasty apology; but he only lifted his hand deprecatingly, his defiance vanishing instantly.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said, trying to be airy, and failing rather pathetically, I thought. "I'm quite used to it."

I tried to figure it out in my mind.

"I simply bashed my interpreter," he explained.

"Bashed your interpreter!"

"What else *could* I do? Some merchants gave me a dinner . . . seventeen courses. Then they started to play fingers . . . and I had to drink that beastly kaoliang wine. Of course I got tight as a tick; but I was sober enough to know when that sneering swine, Pan, insulted me. So I bashed him. Then he wrote a



stinkin' letter to Shanghai." Stanley chewed his moustache for a moment. "They wouldn't listen to *me*."

"How long have you been in China?"

"Four months. I came up from the Straits."

He spoke without heat, in a level, listless tone, as though merely stating the facts of an utterly hopeless case; and there was something about his manner, a philosophical resignation, a calm restraint, that rather appealed to me. I could easily understand him, unsophisticated in the ways of the Chinese, falling prey to the potent native wine; and in the conceit of my judgment, I felt that the Company might condone his actions. It would be impossible for him to remain in Shantung; but he could be sent up North. This I explained carefully. However, he took my advice in smiling silence; and our conversation veered around to other things.

While waiting for dinner, we smoked and chatted on indifferent subjects, until the long shadows fell and the boy lighted the lamps. As conversation languished, Stanley's eyes frequently strayed to my shelf of books, and with each recurring glance his face brightened perceptibly. After a while he rose and drew some of them out.

"I suppose you had plenty of books with you up country?" I suggested.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't have any. They get in the way. After you've read them, they're just dead freight, and it's a crime to throw them away."

"A good book's always worth re-reading. A good story can always be told again."

"Jolly few. Two or three readings are sufficient to memorise the best; and you've a poor imagination if you can't improve on most of them."

He said this with such calm assurance that I was absolutely flattened, and I sat staring at him in silence while he rambled on.

"Some of your books here are rather good, though; but I wouldn't waste time over them if I were you. There's much more to be learned outside in the alleyways, you know. Your poetry's right enough; but this Logic's tricky. Words! It's easier and just as good to evolve your own methods of reasoning. What rule does a Chinese use when he reads your thoughts in the finger game? He doesn't know, and you don't know; but he guesses just the same. The trouble with most of these writers is they don't know enough. Take your economics . . . Menger and Marx at variance with each other . . . and both at variance with the facts, except as they relate to their own civilisation. Neither of them, I wager, knew anything of coolie labour. Men are essentially machines, machines that can be put to work; and it's only superior intelligence that gives them a value above ordinary animals. An elephant can pile teak; a monkey can be trained to pick cotton; a mule on a treadmill can propel a boat . . . do they deserve all the produce of their labour? . . . Bally rot."

I opened my eyes in astonishment. This was a

strange man to be going about the country bashing Chinese. His glance, sparkling with feverish animation, fell upon me; and he paused and pondered.

"Well," he resumed quizzically, "I suppose that does sound like rant, rather. Eh? But, damn it all, you can't live long in the Orient without appreciating the real differences between caste, race and intellect; and you're bound to admit that a really intellectual man of our own race and breeding is about the highest type of human development."

"Oh, yes," I said, like a complaisant schoolboy.

"Now here's the way it shows," he continued. "I ran a plantation for a man down near Kwala Lumpur several years ago, and I noticed the coolies didn't use their tools with complete effect; so I showed them a new way. After that they called me a superman, a little god. Well, why shouldn't they? Their fathers before them had used those tools in the self-same manner for untold generations, and I, who had never before even seen them, showed them a better way. Simply a matter of intelligence and initiative. So, of course, if those coolies represented the standard of manhood, I was above that standard, and therefore a superman. That's logical, isn't it?"

Like Plato's pupil, I was "bound to admit it."

"Well," observed Stanley, stretching himself once more in his chair, "that just proves what a lie logic is."

And then we both laughed unconstrainedly, and the cares of the humdrum world dropped from our shoul-

ders. At that psychological moment the boy announced dinner.

The table was well laid, and the soup looked extremely tempting. For a while we ate in silence, Stanley making a light meal of it, even though he must have been poorly fed in the mountains. But what he ate, he ate with huge relish, and complimented me on its excellence.

"It's a most extraordinary thing," he remarked, "how talkative one gets after having been alone for a long time. Why, I've been gassing away here like a schoolgirl; and, as a matter of fact, I think I'm usually rather quiet."

"It's always that way," I observed.

"Yes, I suppose so. You get crammed up with thoughts out in the hills, and then just as soon as you meet a white man you explode."

I nodded. And then it dawned on me that I hadn't offered him a drink; and I was properly embarrassed, for I hadn't a drop in the compound.

"Not even a whiskey and soda," I confessed.

"Oh, well," said Stanley, "I don't believe I'd care for anything if you had it."

This satisfied me. But later on I noticed an unnatural flush on his cheek-bones; his eyes were glossy bright; and his hands trembled so that he spilled his coffee. He seemed to be on the verge of a bad fever, and I blamed myself for not having some brandy, at least. Afterward I gave him some quinine, which he took without protest.

Toward the end of the meal he began to talk freely again; and it was not long before he had me absolutely enthralled. My admiration was spontaneous and complete. The fact that he was virtually a discharged subordinate never even entered my head. At times he almost seemed like a distinguished guest. He was graceful, courteous, and spoke in a low even voice, except for an occasional querulous note. Whether due to incipient fever or reaction from months of enforced silence, his conversation was positively brilliant. I don't believe I have ever met a man with such a comprehensive knowledge of places and things—a knowledge that merely added nourishment to an already fecund intellect. From anecdotes and the experiences he told me, it was not difficult to form a sketchy idea of his whole life.

After leaving England he had gone to India; thence to South Africa and far up through Rhodesia—and this was in the old days. Afterward he had lived and worked in Burma, Malay, Java, Argentine, Japan, and God only knows where else. He had been a bank clerk; hunted for ivory; planted rubber; mined for tin; fought in a couple of small wars; and maintained an effervescent sort of existence in many other both adventurous and sedentary occupations. Having a well-trained mind and an observant eye, his experiences had naturally made him a brilliant, profound and forceful man. At least that was my impression of him.

There was something about him, however, that impressed me disagreeably, though not at all in the sense

of aversion. It was a half-furtive expression that sometimes crept into his eyes—half furtive, half sad—the expression of an utterly spent man. I did not notice it particularly at first, or, if I did, it was with the thought that probably he was one of those unfortunate men who have studied and meditated to such ill purpose that all things seem trivial and life itself hopeless. As a matter of fact, though, later on he even elaborated a theology of his own, half Brahmin, half Christian, which sounded rather pretty and was quite hopeful; and in the heat of argument, or when elaborating some picturesque incident, the cloud was swept away, and a lively intelligence shone forth, sparkling with wit and understanding.

Suddenly I felt a cool cynicism. I said:

“Well, of course, if everybody spent his life knocking around, the world would go slam, wouldn’t it? The average man must settle down. I suppose the home life is sufficient compensation for all he misses. What was *your* object, anyway?”

In an instant the animation was wiped from his face. For a second he looked at me with a baffled expression. He tried to speak, without formulating his thoughts; then, shrugging his shoulders with an expression of utter weariness, he let his hands drop open by his side.

“I don’t know,” he murmured unevenly. “I don’t know. I suppose my idea was to see the world; and then settle down. . . . Well, I’ve seen the world; and I’ve tried . . . I’ve . . . Well, I can’t settle down now.” He plainly endeavoured to make his explana-

tion humorous by laughing softly, but it only intensified the misery in his eyes.

*“ ‘For to admire and for to see,  
For to be’old the world so wide,  
It never done no good to me,  
But I can’t drop it if I tried.’ ”*

After that we were silent. Then I asked what he intended doing in Shanghai. He didn’t know.

“ All I want now,” he said shamefacedly, “ is to find some place where I can bury myself . . . and write my book. I have no children; and I want to leave something behind. A book!” He evidently thought it necessary to apologise. “ Of course that’s what every one wants to do, every one who’s ever read anything decent or seen life with its clothes off . . . to put his egotistical mark on paper, and try fool himself it will make him immortal. A book! A child of my brain!”

“ The idea’s all right,” I said; “ but there’s no lotos-eating in Shanghai. I’m afraid you’ll have to be more practical; Shanghai’s no place to be on the beach, you know. Still, hang it all, there’s no reason in the world why you should worry. When you get to Shanghai, go in and see Richards himself; tell him the whole story—straight; admit yourself in the wrong. Richards will play the game.”

Stanley got on his feet, and walked uncertainly up and down the room, nervously biting the end of his moustache, and fumbling with the buttons of his coat.

"I don't know." Then his fevered cheek flushed still redder. "I wonder when I'll have another meal like ours to-night."

"Oh, hang it!" I cried impatiently.

"A bottle of Worcester sauce and a rifle were all I needed in Rhodesia; and less than that in the Straits. But it's bally hell to be hungry in a city. It's not half so bad to starve in the open where people can't see you, you know."

"This is perfect rot, Stanley."

"No damned fear. You see, I've been . . .

I jumped to my feet.

"Very well," I said. "We'll employ Rhodesian precautions."

Taking his valise, I emptied it on the cot, carried it over to the provision closet, which I kept in my room against the pilferings of the servants, and proceeded to fill it up with tins and glass jars of vegetables, *pâtés*, preserves and biscuits. His clothing I placed in a soft reed basket. He watched me in silence, and when I had done, merely said: "Thanks, old man." But, after a moment, quite irrelevantly, he asked my age. I told him.

Without bitterness, he said:

"I left Cambridge over fifteen years ago."

It was late when we put out the lights; but we remained awake far into the night talking. I took the opportunity to tell him of my own plans for travel in far places; for I was younger then and haunted by dreams.



"Don't be a fool," he said tensely. "Get home out of this." In another second he was apologising. Then he came over to my cot and thanked me for the night's entertainment. "It's meant more to me than you or any one else can tell. It's been the only lucid interval in a nightmare of years. You've given me a chance to see the old ideals again . . . the old . . ." His voice trailed off; and he stumbled back to his couch, and flung himself down heavily, and lay there silent; while I remained stupidly blinking up at the ceiling, not knowing what on earth to say.

When I awoke in the morning, he was gone.

For three days, lacking other distraction, my memory dwelt upon Stanley. Then I forgot him in the press of my own affairs, for I also received a call from Shanghai, to discuss the opening of new territory; and a week later I was on my way to the metropolitan port. When I passed out through the gate at Hsuchowfu, I felt the oppressive weight of unseemly years upon my shoulders; but when I sprang out of the Nanking train, a day later at the West Shanghai station, into the fresh sunlight of a spring morning, and caught one whiff of violets in the moist air, I shed all sober thoughts as a snake sheds its winter skin.

That week in Shanghai was one of the happiest of my life. Trouble up country made it necessary to postpone the discussion of business, and almost all the time of day was my own. The flower stalls were filled with sweet-scented blossoms; the trees and shrubs along the Bund were bursting into many tints of jade; the

warships of all nations, swaying lazily on the bosom of the tawny Whang Po, blossomed forth in fresh white summer coats of paint; the 'ricksha coolies cast aside their padded jackets and pounded along with a blithe-some air; the song of the tramway gongs, the grunts of the motor cars, the "hi-hi-hi" of the mafoos, all seemed to take on a new significance—to sing and shout of happy endeavour, and joy of life.

At the close of one such pleasant day, I was standing on the balcony of my room in the hotel, staring dreamily across the roofs of the city at the great red eye of day, slowly winking into slumber. I breathed contentedly. The boy came quietly into the room and handed me a card: "Mr. R. Franklin Stanley."

Penned laboriously in the corner, as though by a palsied man, were the words, "Will you see me?"

At sight of the card I was overcome with a conflict of emotions, pleasure at again meeting Stanley, and mortification at not having looked him up as soon as I arrived in town. So full had my mind been with other more immediate concerns that I had not even inquired for him at the office; but now I realised that he must have been discharged or I should have heard of him.

"Why, of course," I exclaimed to the waiting boy. "Of course. Bring him up. And here, boy, touch a light to the grate—it's getting chilly."

I drew down the window blinds, and let the dancing flames light up the room; and placed a couple of chairs

in the cosy glow. Then Stanley entered, wearing a lounge suit and carrying a cane.

I took him eagerly by the hand; but it wilted in my grasp like an empty glove; and suddenly he swayed perilously. I seized him by the arm.

"Here, sit down. . . . Good God, what is it, Stanley? What's the matter?"

He dropped limply into the chair with his cane between his knees, his eyes fixed on the leaping blaze, his face frightful, drawn, purple and twitching. The moustache was chewed into rags, and the lower lip hung pendulous and dripping. Twice he opened his mouth to speak, and struggled vainly for expression. For a moment I was too utterly overcome to know what to do, except to shake him gently by the shoulder. Suddenly his face lost its appearance of vacuity; his eyelids squeezed together; and his lips curled up in a grin. He cackled. I saw in an instant what was the matter with him.

He was stupefied, beastly drunk.

Involuntarily I stepped away from him. I was familiar enough with drunkenness, God knows; but the sight of Stanley slouching in his chair before the fire, cackling like a besotted loafer, all his fine sensibilities dulled, all his grand philosophy and expansive knowledge buried under a sickening load of drink, filled me with unutterable disgust.

It must have showed plainly in my face, for some flicker of sense in his befuddled brain perceived it. He became preternaturally morose and two tears rolled

down his furrowed countenance, which enraged and sickened me; but I said never a word, simply stood there looking at him with revulsion, hardly believing it was the same man. After a while he arose unsteadily, studying the handle of his cane with alternate smiles and frowns.

"'Salright, ol' flick. . . . Shorry t' disturb you. . . . Think I'm drunk, eh? Drunk, drunk, drunken lord 'f creation. . . . Marskee. . . . Going now . . ."

He groped for the handle of the door, lurched out into the hallway, and disappeared.

What devil's impulse restrained me, I don't know; but I let him stagger away without a word of advice, without an effort to sober him, without even a handshake.

This apparition rising before me in the midst of happy days dampened all my enthusiasm like a judge's warning to a sarcastic witness. I spent many hours the next few days meditating on his case, wondering what had become of him, and feeling very much of a cad for not having tried in some way to assist him. I made an inquiry at the office, and one of the managers summed up his experience with him tersely:

"He came in here and sat down and stared at that waste-basket, slobbering all over the front of his coat, and rolling his head about as though he were searching for something. I thought he was going to have the D. T.'s right on the spot. The blighter was impossible. Why, he didn't even report here until after he'd been in town three days."

I protested that this was to be expected, that it is only natural for an up-country man to rip loose a bit when he gets in town.

"Why haven't some of you taken him in hand and straightened him up?"

The manager spread out his hands with a gesture of despair.

"Look here, I've been a good sight longer in this part of the world than you. I know the man's type. I tell you, he's utterly impossible, that's all."

"But Stanley's no fool."

"Of course not. But there's a limit that can't be passed, no matter how bright a man may be. In fact, the brighter they are, the worse they become."

So that ended it, so far as the Company was concerned.

I tried then to locate him in the hotels, but in the end I had to give it up. There was no trace of him.

Then, one day, just at tea time, he dropped in on me again. I was wary in my reception of him, for he'd been drinking again, and I struggled hard with an involuntary aversion; but my innate sympathy for him finally won me over.

I ordered tea, and he ate the biscuits hungrily, but drank nothing. He mumbled an apology for intruding.

"You know you're welcome," I said . . . "welcome as my own brother would be, if you'd only come sober."

His head sank forward on his chest, but he said nothing. He fixed his eyes glassily on the flames,

hypnotising himself like a crystal-gazer, the dilation and contraction of his pupils, and the haggard lines on his relaxed face, telling me all too plainly of the desperate thoughts that gnawed at his brain. He was no pleasant sight to me who had thought to grow fond of him.

But then as I watched him, with his mouth dropped open and the muscles of his face twitching involuntarily, he was so pathetically helpless—a really great mind humbled—that I began to feel shame for my prejudice, and only a great sorrow for his failing. A feeling of companionship came over me, and I think he must have sensed it, for he suddenly broke the silence with a murmured remark about a book of verses he had picked up in my room at Hsuchowfu. It had appealed to him.

Anxious to distract his thoughts from his present condition I made a few random remarks about poetry, though, as a matter of fact, the subject had never keenly interested me. In my mind's eye I always see the poet scratching down rhyming words on the edge of a piece of paper. There's too much jingle and never enough sincerity to please me.

"I know some good poetry," mumbled Stanley, frowning heavily at the fire. "*Good poetry. Better 'n anything y' ever read.*"

And then he began to wave his hand slowly about with a vague gesture, mumbling to himself; and I sat bolt upright, afraid to breathe for a moment, for I could have sworn he had them.

A piece of cannel coal collapsed into a hundred glowing embers, the little flames dancing about and leaping up the chimney with a lively crackling. Stanley lurched forward until his face flared with reflected fire.

All his body was bathed in shadow save his tormented countenance and a lean twisted hand which he thrust out toward the coals, like the hand of a lost soul clutching at vanished ideals. He began to mumble, incoherently at first, his eyes bulging with aching intensity, as though straining to visualise some vague memory or imagined phantom. To begin with I was thrilled at the mere sight of him, but as his words took form I sat there with my eyes fixed on him and listened breathlessly. He spoke in broken meters, but it was such poetry as I had never heard before.

The whole business seemed like an unpremeditated séance, Stanley the medium for two spirits, a riven soul from hell and an angel of light. The words were words of vitriol, of tinkling golden instruments, of hissing adders, of gently stirring streams. At first it seemed like the imagery of a gifted maniac, crude, appalling, despairing, but through the tumult of discordant pain came flashes of true inspiration. When his words were vague, his contracted face interpreted them. Then he began groping painfully through darkened space for something once familiar and very dear. It seemed that if he could grasp that essential idea, it would clear his brain, revive his old idealism. In the intensity of my interest I was lost to all surround-

ings; until suddenly the room was bathed in white light.

The room-boy had turned on the electric switch.

"Master wantchee light?"

I got dazedly to my feet, rubbing my eyes, as though awakening from a beautiful yet sinister dream.

"Confound you," I grumbled. "I suppose so. Now, get out." Then, turning to Stanley, I said: "That's great. Who wrote it?"

He smiled wanly.

"I wrote it. . . . I think I must have been drunk . . . or mad."

As I recall the scene now I can understand that it probably was not nearly so good as I supposed. It was, perhaps, only the aptness of it that made it seem so great; but then, I am no critic, and, God's truth, I was strangely stirred. However, I was wise enough not to over-praise it.

The interruption seemed to have killed Stanley's spirit. He sat gazing miserably into the fire. I tried to arouse him; but after a while he said:

"You remember Kipling's lost legion . . . the tale of the men who went before? . . . Well, I'm of that legion . . . a poor 'black sheep that's gone astray . . . baa! baa!'"

He tried to leave then without another word; but I held him and pleaded with him, and damned him like an erring brother, conjuring up his manhood, reviving his ideals. . . .

"Ideals."



He tried to laugh cynically.

But I flattered myself afterward that I had brought back the love of life to his heart, and stirred the zest of battle in his soul. Then I loaned him some money, gave him cards to a number of business houses, and sent him away.

These were my concessions to conscience, but I continued to worry about him for several days afterward. There was no reason in the world why he should not be of value to a good firm, always provided he kept sober; and there was no reason I could see why he could not keep sober. A man with a small mind might not have sufficient will to combat the inclination to drink, but Stanley in his sober moments certainly realised his degradation. . . . I could tell by the lines of mental suffering on his face . . . and that, I thought, ought to check him up.

At all events I felt optimistic; and when next I met him his changed mood seemed to confirm my hopes.

In the first place he was sober. Then, although I could just perceive that he was covering up a profound gravity, his tone was light, almost bantering, but with a strong flavour of cynicism about it.

"I'm sorry to bother you again," he said by way of opening, slapping his hands together, and rubbing his palms with the air of a man who has just put through a good bit of business. "In fact I wouldn't have come here at all if I hadn't thought you were interested. You see, you have the proud distinction of being the

only friend I possess in the Orient. Something to boast of, eh? ”

He laughed, almost cheerfully.

“ But don’t let it worry you, because I’m not going to impose on you again. You see, I’ve found a way out. . . . ”

“ Fine! ” I cried. “ Great! What are you going to do? ”

“ Nothing. ”

I looked blank, and he grinned feebly.

“ It’s an easy job . . . nothing to do except look for trouble, only popping when the pan is hot. I’m only a failure at anything else . . . no will power, no energy, no stomach. . . . ”

I jumped to my feet.

“ For Heaven’s sake, Stanley . . . ”

“ Please don’t argue! Please! ” he protested peevishly. “ I’m fed up with moral dissertations. Besides I ought to know what I’m talking about; I’ve worked the whole bally thing out. I tried to scoop myself the other day, and I didn’t have the nerve to finish it decently. Made a mess of it. ”

He turned his head and showed me a nasty gash behind his ear, rubbing his hand gently over it, with the ruminative air of a man feeling a second day’s growth of beard.

“ Rotten, ” he mused. “ Rotten. And I didn’t have the nerve to try again. ”

What could I say? I opened my lips several times to speak; but I could think of nothing.

"Oh, well," he said quite cheerfully, rubbing his hands briskly together again, "if you can't do it one way, you can do it another. Might as well have a run for your money too. . . . About the cards you gave me. Thanks awf'ly, but I was drunk when I presented them, so of course there was nothing doing."

"Well, what *are* you going to do?" I demanded.

"I'll tell you. First I tried your people, and failed; then I tried the dirk, and made a bad job of that . . . couldn't live respectably, and couldn't die quietly. Then things began to look serious. I didn't know *what* I was going to do. I was feeling rather fed up with the whole affair when I happened to see the French consul go by in his carriage. That gave me an idea. I called on him; and to-morrow I'm leaving for Saigon."

"Saigon? What in the world will you do in Saigon? And how are you going to get there?"

He placed his trembling hand on his chest, and bowed satirically.

"In me you see a French legionary . . . soldier of France, offering his life in the forefront of battle for eleven sous and a handful of onions per diem . . . accoutrements, simple . . . ammunition, ad lib."

The thought flashed through my head: "By Jove, it's the best place for him."

"Fine!" he continued mockingly. "Great! The grandest reward for my noblest achievement will be a grave to myself . . . instead of being a unit on a community pyre . . . and three honorific volleys over my

slumbering carcass. A great ending, eh? Well, anyway, in another incarnation I may have a better chance. Unless I come out a wood-tick or a bedbug or something like that."

All of a sudden a fit of laughter came over him, and he doubled up, coughing and spluttering.

I conjured up another picture then . . . a picture of Stanley in the Legion, virtually a prisoner for life, fighting his way through the reeking jungle or over blistering sands; wracked on a bed of fever under a shower of poisoned darts; or cursing his useless sand-choked rifle, and trying desperately to fend the dervish's lance that finally impales him. And all to what end? I looked at Stanley, struggling with his unseemly mirth. I thought of the tragic waste of it all. But suddenly it came to me that this was the only chance left him . . . death or glory . . . or, at least, in the end to go down to his grave without dishonour.

At first I played the hypocrite, and protested, feebly. In another moment, however, I was eagerly supporting his decision. And then we talked the whole thing over.

It was not a flippant boyish conversation, rendered picturesque by lying imaginations; for I think we both fully realised that we were sitting at the funeral of a man's ambitions. We were conspirators deliberately plunging a fine mind into oblivion, not merely annihilating it; but destroying it in such a manner that not even a ripple would betray its passing.

Still we had a mind to be pleasant over the affair, as one who, shaming to weep at pathos, strengthens himself by conjuring up his sense of the ridiculous. So when our conversation drew to a natural conclusion we still had an appearance of light-heartedness. But suddenly a silence fell upon us, and when he rose to go, I said nothing but walked slowly with him to the elevator, my hand upon his shoulder.

He chuckled quite unexpectedly.

"A dying man may have his last desire in peace," he said, "and to-night, by the sacred tooth of Siva, I'm going to get gloriously drunk."

To this I had nothing to say. He was already beyond the pale.

It was the evening hour. We heard the elevator descending through the gloom to our level. We shook hands solemnly. The elevator came to a stop; the mummy-faced Chinese boy opened the gate with a clang; and Stanley stepped in. At that moment I made the most unfortunate remark that has ever come to my lips:

"Don't lose your nerve, old man. . . . And may it be glory! Remember you haven't got a thing to lose. It's not as though you were leaving some one behind." . . . The gate closed and the elevator was about to drop. . . . "That is, you know, no one to give the thing the air of tragedy. . . . *I mean to say, there was no woman, for instance!* . . ." The words faltered on my lips.

He had turned swiftly toward me, raising his hands as though to ward off a blow. His face was ashen and contorted, like that of a cholera victim. The cage was dropping, but through the cell-like mesh I could still see him clearly.

"Oh, my God," he said with misery. "My God, that's just it. There . . ."

But I couldn't catch the last words, for his face fell forward into his clutching hands, while the Chinese boy glanced amusedly at him . . . and he was suddenly swallowed in the black maw of the shaft.

Thus he had dropped out of my life, and apparently into oblivion; but we hadn't reckoned on the passion of nations . . . on a storm that stirred up the depths.

What my ambitions were in those days I am ashamed to say; but here I was in Aden, rather lonely despite my well-meaning messmates, and feeling strangely useless and out of it all. And Stanley, about whom I used to wonder if that fine brain had become food for the black vulture or the little white ant. . . .

"Gad, this is good stuff," said Eric. "Listen."

Two of our messmates, absorbed in their own reading, looked up impatiently.

"Carry on," I urged.

"No," he said, tossing me the paper, and yawning. "These blasé brutes wouldn't appreciate it. . . . Read it yourself."

So I read the last chapter in the epic tale of that romantic crew—the Foreign Legion—how they cap-

tured an important fort in the Bois Sabot, a salient that menaced the French lines . . . a horseshoe-shaped affair behind a field of barbed wire that could be swept by shells and enfiladed by machine guns. They were two days fighting their way for a position from which to assault. And on the last day as they stood in a wood, drenched with rain and wracked by shells, a fifth of their men were down even before they debouched for the assault. When they got into the open it must have been hell.

They were smashed to pieces. When a man went down his body twitched and rolled under the blast of lead, like a mole in a hail-storm. Miniature craters burst open at their feet, and, falling, they were buried with earth by the next explosion. None but the Legion could have done it. They actually reached the entanglements, and smashed and tore their way through. But when the path was cleared, they were all down, all except one man. He alone of all his battalion got through, and reached the first trench before he fell, with a fresh battalion, unhindered by entanglements, charging after him.

When I finished the article I closed my eyes and saw Stanley once more, peering into the shadows of the future, searching for some lost ideal, believing that his end would be a futile waste. And I wondered dully of the woman whose name had faltered on his lips. . . .

I should like to have told her that he was that last man to fall, as I like to believe, face forward, giving

his life for an ideal, after all, within the entanglements of the fort in the Bois Sabot.

“Soldiers of the Legion,” said General Deligny, fifty years ago, “the folds of your flag are not broad enough to hold your claims to glory.”



# THE BLACK POOL

BY

FREDERICK STUART GREENE

AUTHOR OF

THE CAT OF THE CANE-BRAKE—*Metropolitan  
Magazine*

THE BUNKER MOUSE—*Century Magazine*

A TICKET TO NORTH CAROLINA—*Century Magazine*

GALWAY INTRUDES—*Century Magazine*

The repeated rejections of this story led to the idea of **THE GRIM THIRTEEN**. It was sent to every magazine where it was likely to have the ghost of a chance and came back with unusual promptness, never, however, accompanied by that day-glooming, heart-chilling atrocity, the printed rejection slip. One busy editor took the time to write two pages about it; and each refusal had some word to lighten the blow.

F. S. G.

### XIII

#### THE BLACK POOL

**T**HE heavy, wrought-iron gates of the Van Norden estate stand now grimly closed. The driveway leading to the deserted house on the hill stretches weed-grown and unused between the double row of blight-killed chestnuts. But it is not the dead trees, towering bark-stripped and bleached, that halt the trespasser; in the glen to the right, hidden from the road, lies the dread spot of the neighbourhood. Here, shut in by crowded locust trees, their scraggy tops thrust high above a thicket of underbrush and tangled cat-briar, gleams the sombre surface of Black Pool.

The Van Norden family had tried for years to have their lake called Mirror Pool. But the native Long Islander frowned; Black Pool it had been in his grandfather's time, and Black Pool it must stay. And yet the word "mirror" fits well this long, narrow pond. The trees on its banks meet with scarcely a break above the still water, the growing leaves on the spread branches throw always a dense shade across the dark surface; the dead leaves, falling season after season, sink to the bottom, and rotting build up an ever-thickening mould of inky blackness which makes the

clear water reflect distinctly every object on the shores.

A black pool it is, and a black mirror as well—a mirror into which none now care to gaze. In winter the skater's laughter sounds no more on the pond; the voices of those once eager to use its frozen surface, no longer stir the silence of the fatal place. After night-fall, winter or summer, the passerby turns far aside to avoid its dismal banks.

The once fine bath house stands now at crazy angles, its sagging walls, paint-scaled and blotched, buckle under the burden of its leaking roof. Black Pool, once the pride of the Van Nordens, now lies a deserted tarn amid the neglected grounds of a desolate estate.

In the grey stone house, a half-mile away through the woods, lived, fifty odd years ago, the chief actors in the tragedy that gave Black Pool its blacker history. To the master and mistress of this ill-fated home twins had come, boys, such striking duplicates that only their mother could instantly tell them apart; acquaintances, even old friends, were forced to wait, uncertain, until one or the other had spoken. Speech lessened the difficulty of recognition, for the Van Norden brothers had escaped one drawback of twin life: individual personalities had been granted them. Schuyler Van Norden was quick in speech, action and temper; Allan Van Norden was thoughtful, slow-speaking, slow to wrath. But the one sure sign that distinguished them was the difference in their laughs. Schuyler, amused, would

'draw his brows to a swift frown, then throw his head far back and break into a big, full laugh. Allan's appreciation of humour was more quiet, his laugh never started with the contradictory frown nor was followed by the thrown back head. Schuyler was the nervous, dashing leader, Allan the steady, strong wheel-horse of the tandem.

During their school years the twins were for the Judge and Mrs. Van Norden an unending subject for friendly debate. Their mother, a contented smile lighting her face, would declare:

"Schuyler will distinguish himself at the bar. Those quick changes in voice would make a famous actor—not, of course, that such a career is fitting." And her handsome head would nod confidently.

The Judge, taking long pulls at his meerschaum, would open for his client.

"Allan is steady; long making up his mind, but once made—still water, my dear, still water."

The old saw that brothers must fight, seemed doomed to fail with the Van Norden twins. As the years sped past, the threads of their lives knitted ever to a closer mesh.

When the last examination at the preparatory school was passed, Judge Van Norden laughed contentedly behind his white beard.

"Haven't I held for Allan all along? Not first in his class, but where was your Schuyler?"

Mrs. Van Norden fanned placidly, her smile unclouded.

"Who was given the leading part in the school play?"

The Judge, smoking in thoughtful silence, conceded her point. Across the many acres of their land, the contented mother and father watched the setting sun drop into the hills beyond the far shore of the red-tinted Sound.

Then again Mrs. Van Norden's pleasant voice:

"Just wait, college will be the real test; friends count."

The line between the Judge's brows deepened.

"I surprised the scamps to-day, caught them smoking those new-fangled cigarettes. Schuyler burnt his hand." His frown eased. "Allan, the rascal, only laughed: 'Caught me fair that time, your Honour.'"

In their senior year at college an incident occurred that would have scored a point for the Judge had any whisper of it reached Black Pool, but the brothers never spoke of the affair, and the few other witnesses were sworn to silence by Nicholas Porter, the most intimate friend Allan had made at the university. During this last year of their college life Schuyler's evenings were not always spent with his more studious brother. On a night shortly before finals, Allan, tired of waiting, closed his book and paced the floor uneasily. When the college clock struck the single note of the new morning, he frowned and going to the window peered through the rain-splashed glass. The row of lights, bordering the wet walks, flickered dimly above a deserted campus.

Schuyler rushed into the room and threw himself on a chair.

"Say something!" he cried. "Speak to me, Allan!"

"What's the trouble, Schuyler; lost heavily to-night? I'm ahead of my allowance, you know." The wish to aid gave a deeper tone to Allan's slow voice.

For long no word came. The rain lashing against the windows made the only sound in the room.

Allan took his brother's head between both hands and forced Schuyler to meet his eyes. Their two faces, one drawn by despair, the other furrowed by anxiety, were as like as a face before a mirror and the reflection in the glass.

"Now tell me, Schuy."

"It was——" Schuyler's eyes dropped before Allan's steady look. "I've been accused of cheating!"

"Hell!" Allan sprang back, his face white for the instant before the blood surged up to his temples. "Who accused you?"

"Foley."

"And you've killed him." Allan's words were spoken slowly.

"No! No! Not that!"

"Then what did you do?"

"I—why, I—I didn't do anything."

"Are you telling me that you let John Foley accuse you of cheating and get off scot free?" The question came in slower dismay.

"I was so—so—— Oh, Allan, I didn't know what

to do!" Schuyler crouched lower in the chair and covered his eyes.

Wonder held Allan silent. Was this shrinking man before him his brother? The muscles at his throat tightened; slowly the colour left his face. Could it be possible that——? No! The thought shamed him. It was sheer amazement—that was it—amazement! A Van Norden accused of cheating at cards! It was the absurdity of it that had stunned Schuyler beyond action.

"I understand, Schuyler," Allan's arm was about his brother's shoulder, "it's all right. This is my affair now."

The look in Schuyler's eyes made Allan turn hastily away. He crossed the room and taking up a heavy cane hurried down the hall to halt before a room from which came the sound of loud voices.

Allan threw the door open. Instantly silence fell, the men about the card-table stood, each holding the pose Allan's coming had caught.

"I'm *Allan* Van Norden!"

The announcement eased the tension. Allan looked deliberately from one excited face to the other, to end, at last, at a heavy-eyed, heavily built man across the table from him.

"My brother, Schuyler, tells me that Foley, here, has accused him of cheating. Does any other man in the room back this accusation?" Again he searched each face. "I see that none of you do; and for the good reason that Foley lied!" He wheeled upon the



heavy-eyed man. "Now, Mr. Foley, you'll tell these gentlemen that my brother did not cheat, and that you lied when you said that he did!"

Foley stepped back, dragging a chair clear from the table.

"Like hell, I will! I said he cheated and I say so again!"

Allan sprang for him. The chair fell hard against his shoulder, he wrenched it from Foley's grasp and sent it flying across the room. At the same instant he brought the heavy cane crashing to the man's head. Before any one could close in, Allan, holding Foley to his feet, struck again. The second blow split the man's scalp, opening a long gash.

Nicholas Porter was the first to reach the struggling pair. He threw his arms about Allan and dragged him back. Some one seized Foley and the fighting men were finally torn apart.

"Stop! You crazy man!" Allan heard Porter yell over his shoulder. "You'll kill him!"

"That's what I'm going to do," Allan panted. "He said my brother cheated! Let me go, damn you!"

Foley had sunk to the floor.

"Allan, what in Heaven's name has come over you? The man's down! You can't hit him. He's out, I tell you!"

Porter's words steadied Allan; after a moment he turned from the fallen man and let his friend take him back to his rooms.

But during the few hours still left of that night no

sleep came to Allan; he passed them in after thoughts of his act. His friends, he knew, had been surprised at the outburst; but he felt more than surprise, he was amazed to know for the first time the whirlwind force of his passion.

The Van Norden twins began the real work of life in the law office of their father. Here, as at college, Allan was the sure plodder. It was nearly a year after Schuyler's maiden speech at the bar, that Allan felt himself competent to address a jury. When, however, he had done so, speaking in his slow, distinct manner, the Court complimented the young attorney on his handling of the case.

It was but a short time after this success of Allan's that the first blow was struck at the happiness of the family at Black Pool; Judge Van Norden's long life came to an honoured end. Both the boys felt keenly their loss, but realising their mother's greater sorrow, did all they could to comfort her. It was Allan, however, who remembered that a cushion adds to the comfort of elderly ladies; that open windows behind his mother's chair were not safe. When, after a time, the stately old lady took again her place in her world, esquired by her tall sons, Schuyler was the first of her knights to talk or dance with some pretty girl.

There came a day, about a year after the Judge's death, when Schuyler failed to meet his brother for the one afternoon train that ran in those times. That

night was the first the twins had ever spent under separate roofs.

When Allan reached home he told his mother all the news the papers had furnished for the day, hoping his talk would cause her to think lightly of Schuyler's absence. When the stock of press items ran short, he turned to local affairs. He had heard they were to have a neighbour; the place next to Black Pool had been rented by a Mr. Reid, a widower with an only daughter.

The first Sunday after these new neighbours were established in their home, Mrs. Van Norden ordered the carriage, and in spite of her sons' pleadings to be let off, insisted that they go with her for this duty call.

Mr. Reid welcomed his visitors. His daughter, he explained, had gone to the stables to look over a newly arrived saddle horse, but would be with them presently.

"We must reopen the gate between our places," Mrs. Van Norden said graciously; "it has been nailed up for two years now. It's about half a mile through the woods to our house, you know."

They were in the midst of one of those general locality descriptions usual to first calls; Schuyler was fluently sketching the neighbourhood, when he stopped abruptly.

Marion Reid had come through the door.

Schuyler sprang forward; and Allan thought he held the offered hand longer than necessary.

As the girl greeted his mother her profile was turned

to Allan. Could her full face be lovelier? Certainly the line of her strong chin, the delicate curve of her throat, were unmatched by any he had seen. When his turn came and he had his first look straight into her brown eyes, he was conscious of his quick indrawn breath, as his hand closed about hers.

Later, while Marion was giving them tea, Allan saw how often her look turned from Schuyler to him, then back again.

"I know," he said in his slow way, "you're thinking you'll never be able to tell us apart. Now confess?"

"No, you're wrong," though she smiled, Marion took his question gravely, "but you are near the truth. I was thinking that I would never fail to know that you are Mr. Allan, and you," she turned to his brother, "are Mr. Schuyler Van Norden."

"If you can do that, you will be the only person, except Mother, who can."

They were all listening to Allan; his tone was unusually earnest.

Schuyler laughed.

"Of course Miss Reid can see that I'm lots handsomer than old Allan."

"It's not a question of looks at all," Marion did not return Schuyler's laugh, "but you are different. I can't tell just how—but you are different," she repeated confidently.

When time for leave-taking came, Marion walked with Mrs. Van Norden to the carriage and stood wav-

ing from the terrace, as it drove away. The sunlight fell on her uncovered head, giving a brighter glow to her copper hair. Allan, silent, begrudged each turn of the wheels that widened the distance between them.

"They are both delightful," Mrs. Van Norden said contentedly. "Undoubtedly cultured; quite an acquisition, I should say."

"Old Reid will do nicely; and that girl," Schuyler waved an appreciative hand toward heaven, "did any one ever see such a complexion?"

When they reached home Allan turned to his brother.

"Come into the billiard room, Schuyler, I've something I want to say."

He put his arm through Schuyler's, and led him from the hall.

"We've never had a secret from each other," he began.

"I plead not guilty, Allan. I haven't any secret."

"And I don't intend to have one from you. We've shared in everything, but I have known that sooner or later a time must come when we could not share." He paused. Schuyler's smile did not make it easy. "You'll think me a fool, but the girl we have just seen is the girl I'm going to marry, if I can persuade her to have me."

Looking straight into Schuyler's eyes, he watched him frown in his characteristic way, then throw his head far back and laugh.

"Well, if Brother hasn't woke up all of a sudden!

But why so solemn with wedding bells ringing in your ears? "

"Because, Schuyler," Allan was not smiling, "I saw your face when Miss Reid joined us; you never looked that way before at any woman."

Again the quick frown and the laugh.

"Why, man, if you're jealous already, you must be hard hit."

"No, I'm not jealous; but I want you to know, Schuyler, that I was never more serious in my life. If you care as I do,—as I think you care, or will care,—it must be a fair field, an open game. Otherwise all that has been so much in our lives will turn bitter. If you win, I don't say it will not hurt, but I do say I'll stand the gaff and be glad it's not some other man."

Schuyler rose.

"Old boy, you're a wonder! Miss Reid's a fine girl, the prettiest I've seen in a dog's age; but I'm not so quick on the trigger. When I fall in love with her I'll tell you all about it."

A smile drove the serious look from Allan's face.

"That's all I ask." He held out his hand, but Schuyler, reaching for a billiard cue, did not see it.

"Come on, Allan, we have still time for one game before dinner."

The neighbourhood opened its arms to the Reids, the welcome a trifle heartier, perhaps, that it had begun with Mrs. Van Norden. As for Marion, she was liked

on sight by every man, and better, by every girl she met. Wherever she went Allan watched her success in a happy glow; a success of which the girl was as unconscious as is a child of its good health. Of the many admirers drawn within the range of her charm, the Van Norden twins caught the light of her smile the oftenest. The hinges of the reopened gate between the estates were free now from rust. The path through the woods of the Reid place was used daily by one brother or the other, often by both together.

On an evening some months after the coming of the Reids, when Allan was alone with his mother, she smiled up at him from her needlework.

"I hope, Allan, we shall have to do over the old farmhouse on the other side of the Pool before very long. But I do wish I knew which of my boys will need it."

"I'd give anything in the world, Mother, to be the one who will. Schuyler promised he would tell me if he cared for Marion; he hasn't said so yet."

Mrs. Van Norden was silent for some moments before she spoke.

"It would be hard for Schuyler to do that now. He's not as frank as you, Allan."

It was only a few days after this talk that Allan came into the room where his mother and Schuyler were playing a last game of cribbage for the evening. His face was like sunrise above the edge of a June sea.

"I have wonderful news!" He crossed to his mother and kissed her. "Mother, I'm the happiest——" He

stopped abruptly. "Yes, I know they all say that, but it's such a big thing in a man's life we don't know what else to say."

He held out a hand to his brother. Looking only at his mother he did not see that Schuyler's mouth had closed to a bitter line. The pulse of his own happiness beating high, hid the tremor in the hand he caught.

His mother returned Allan's kiss.

"I'm so happy, so glad for you, my son." And Allan knew, in spite of the break in her voice, that she meant it.

"Splendid, old man!" If Schuyler's hearty tone was forced, he pounded Allan's shoulder vigorously enough.

"Mother, I can't believe it yet—it seems impossible that a girl like her should——" Allan turned to his brother: "Schuyler, there is only one thing now; you said you would tell me; but I can't believe any man could know Marion and——"

"All lovers think that, don't they, Allan?" Schuyler paused. Then with a quick change of voice: "I suppose you'll have your friend, Nicholas Porter, for best man?"

Allan looked at him in surprise.

"Why, of course not! I haven't thought of a best man, but you are the only one I would ever choose for that service."

There followed, for Allan and Marion, those days that no cloud can dim, no storm drench the joy of



them. Every hour was crowded by great planning. There was the Dutch farmhouse to be remodelled, and together they discussed every line of the new plans; watched each day the building of this lodging for their happiness.

To Allan the big mystery, why Marion had chosen him, was yet unsolved; why him, instead of Schuyler.

"Tell me, Marion," he asked when as usual they had met at her gate and were walking under the trees, "why did you care for me with Schuyler about; and how do you always tell us apart?"

Marion looked up at him through the gathering darkness, and smiled at his serious tone.

"Lower your head and I'll whisper."

After a moment she fulfilled her promise.

"It's your slow, nice voice, your less sure manner, the gentle dear way of you, that always tells me; that makes me love my Allan. But most of all it's your voice."

The alterations to the farmhouse were to be completed during the last weeks of April and Marion selected the first of May for the wedding. Three nights before that day a sudden storm swept in from the sea, on a wind so violent that telegraph wires were torn down throughout the length of the Island.

The evening following the storm, a messenger from the railroad station rode up to the Van Norden house. The brothers had just reached home.

"We've got one wire working," he explained as he

swung out of the saddle. "So I brought this telegram up for Mr. Allan."

Allan read the message, then frowned as he crumpled it in his hand.

"What's wrong, Allan?"

"It's from Nick Porter. Hanged if he hasn't been arrested. Wants me to come to town at once."

"Well, if you hurry, you can catch the evening town train."

"And not see Marion? Why, man, you forget that day after to-morrow is May the first! Schuy, you'll have to go——" Allan stopped short; Schuyler was frowning. There had been no friendship between Porter and Allan's brother since that night of the card party.

"Of course I can't let Nick spend the night in jail," Allan hurried to say. "But Marion will come to meet me." He stood for a moment silent. "Will you go to our gate at the edge of the woods, Schuy, at eight sharp, and tell her why I can't come?"

"Certainly, I will. You run to the stable before the horses are unhitched; take the back road; you've just nine minutes, but you'll make it."

Schuyler watched from the porch as Allan raced away. When his brother had turned a corner of the drive, Schuyler's brows drew to their quick frown; then he threw his head far back, and laughed.

On the way to his room he stopped before a bronze cupid, whose outstretched hands held torches to light the great hallway.

"Will you go to *our* gate at the edge of the woods," Schuyler's smile took on a bitter twist, "and tell her why I can't come?" The words were spoken aloud, in Allan's slow voice. He laughed softly and hurried up the wide stairs.

Later, before leaving his room to join his mother, he paused, and behind the closed door once again rehearsed his brother's parting words to him.

Allan found that his friend, Porter, while driving a spirited horse through a crowded side street, had struck a child. Though the accident was due solely to the heedlessness of the injured boy, it required work and time to find a magistrate and persuade him to accept bail. Porter was finally released, but at an hour too late for Allan to return to Black Pool; and the whole of the next day was wasted in tiresome court proceedings connected with the case. Allan tried to telegraph Marion, but the company, due to the still crippled service, would accept only messages of grave importance.

It was long after the usual hour when Allan reached home. He hurried at once to the trysting place. Marion was not at the gate to meet him. Impatient, urged by a great longing on this last night before she was to be with him always, he began running beneath the trees. After a time, he made out her figure far ahead. He called to her and ran on faster to cut the seconds of their separation. For the first time her pace had not quickened at his voice. He slowed to a

walk. Through the growing darkness he saw, with eyes that could miss no change in her, that to-night her step lagged. Allan stopped dead and watched the girl's slow approach in vague alarm. There was in the poise of her head, about her shoulders, an indefinable something, a droop, he had never seen before.

Allan called again to her, hoping she had not heard his first cry. Sudden dread gripped him; the quick response he longed to see, had not come; Marion was walking as before, slowly toward him, her head still bowed.

"Marion, dear one, it's your Allan!" he pleaded. There was no sign that she had heard.

"Marion!" He called louder and held out his arms.

Only a few paces separated them now. She raised her head for an instant; then with a cry that cut to his deepest nerve, she sprang forward and buried her face on his breast. She clung to him quivering.

"Why, Marion, precious one, what——?"

"Don't speak! Don't speak to me yet, Allan!"

At the distress in her voice Allan's heart tightened. He held her in strong, tender arms, silently stroking her trembling shoulder while long minutes dragged by.

"Precious, may I speak now? What has hurt you?" His struggle to steady his voice did not show in the gentle tone so dear to her.

They stood there together, long silent, in the gloom; Allan holding the quivering girl hard against him. When at last her sobbing eased, he dared speak again;

"Dear one," he pleaded, "let me look into your eyes."

She pressed her face harder against his breast.

"Not yet, Allan! I can't! I can't!"

He lifted her face. But she fought against him, hiding her eyes again.

He bent down until his lips pressed her forehead.

"Now, Marion, tell me. I cannot wait longer."

Faintly her broken, frightened words reached him:

"Oh, Allan, how could you? You—we must have been mad last night!"

Within his breast something shattered to bits as freezing water shivers glass. Her words turned his heart to ice, deadening every nerve; only his brain withstood the numbing chill. Then rage reared its blinded head and beat sledge strokes against his temples. Slowly, above his turmoil of torture one sane thought rose, crying to him through his misery: *She must never know!* He must hide his wrath; no trace of his horror must show. For a moment he stood, his teeth clenched to hold silent the outraged cry straining his throat. He could not trust himself to speak, but crushed her close within his protecting arms. Not daring now to meet her eyes, he bent low over the drooped head and pressed his lips against her hair, longing, yet fearing to kiss her trembling lips, lest his frozen ones betray the secret horror they must not speak.

*She must never know!*

Allan and his bride returned to Black Pool during the early days of June; their homecoming hastened by a message from Schuyler that business called him from town and office affairs made it necessary for Allan to be on hand.

Mr. Reid had started, immediately after his daughter's wedding, on an indefinite trip to the far East. So it fell that Mrs. Van Norden was the only one to welcome back the husband and wife. As she led them into the big living-room of the new house she smiled happily and turned to Marion:

"I shall do all I can for my two children to offset your disappointment that Schuyler is not here. I know, Allan, not having him with us makes your homecoming incomplete."

Allan crossed to a window and lowered a shade.

Schuyler's absence was lengthened by one excuse or another into weeks. When, at last, he returned, Allan and Marion were quite settled in the new home, and their lives, Mrs. Van Norden declared, lay all before them, a broad path, smoothed ready for work and happiness. Happiness! The very word was a mockery to Allan, but he had managed to hide even from his mother's discerning eyes the smouldering rage that poisoned his life.

Schuyler reached home one Saturday night, too late to see the people at the farmhouse. He made amends by writing them a note which was delivered early Sunday morning. Allan had just finished his answer when Marion joined him in the breakfast-room.

"Schuyler has come back." Allan looked toward her.

Marion was standing where the morning light fell full, the sun glistening her copper hair. To Allan's eyes, God had made her finer than any other thing. There was in his wife's face a beauty so exquisite, that looking at her suddenly, brought always to him a sensation near kin to pain. This sense of her beauty strengthened, to-day, his determination to carry through the plan his disturbed brain had worked out.

Marion crossed to him, and looking over his shoulder, read the note.

"Dear Schuyler," it began, "to have you home again is my only wish left unfulfilled. You are coming over for lunch, of course, but let's have a swim first. I'll meet you at the pool at eleven. We haven't held the test this year—to-day will be just right for a try. I'm anxious to see if that sign-post is still far away.

"Ever your affectionate brother,

"ALLAN."

As Marion finished reading, she leaned down and kissed Allan.

"I don't believe that two brothers ever lived whose love was as perfect as yours and Schuyler's."

The pen Allan still held snapped in two parts.

"But come now, Allan," Marion had not seen his closed hands,—“come to breakfast, and then you can tell me about that test you wrote of.”

"It's only a boy's game; each year Schuyler and I have made the swim from the diving float around

the grey stone, at the end of the pool, and back again."

"Is that all! You do that nearly every time you go in."

"But not for a record. The year we started to college Schuyler suggested that we time our swims; each year after that we have held the test, and each year we have bettered our record."

"My Allan won, of course, and now he expects me to award the prize."

"I'll take the reward before telling you." Then after a moment: "I really deserve it; it's pretty even, but I lead Schuyler by two victories. He says the year our time fails to improve, will show we're at the sign-post that points out the middle-age road."

"I'll hold the watch for you to-day."

"No," Allan answered. "The test is strictly private. I'd hate to let any one know, even you, dear, that we had reached that sign-post."

"Very well, then. But even if you win you get no prize this time."

"I shall not fail to-day, Marion."

"Then don't be so serious about it. Your look doesn't go well with victory." She rose and, standing behind him, joined her hands under his chin. "If you'll smile again, perhaps I'll let you discount your winning now."

After breakfast they went together out into the sunshine.

Walking among the flowers of their old-fashioned



garden he watched the joy she took in them with eyes that grew more serious as the minutes passed. He had trouble, when she looked suddenly at him, to call up a smile in time to meet her glances.

Allan purposely reached the pool some minutes after the appointed time. Schuyler was in one of the compartments of the large bath house, so their greetings were carried on by calls over the top of the partition between their rooms. When Allan, ready for swimming, came out to the float, Schuyler was in the water; no handclasp had been exchanged between the brothers at the end of their longest separation.

"I'm feeling uncommonly well to-day," Schuyler called. "I'll bet you any part of a hundred that I lower the record."

"Just for boasting, Schuyler, you'll have to start first. Climb out, I have the watch."

Schuyler gained the float and stood beside his brother. Upon the smooth surface of Black Pool, lay two mirrored portraits, every curve of the muscular bodies alike, every line of the handsome faces identical. In expression only was there a difference; Schuyler's face was lighted by the excitement of the coming test. Allan's face was white, his jaw set.

"Ready, Allan, give the word!" Schuyler balanced himself at the edge of the float, his arms uplifted, his muscles tense for the spring.

Allan's eyes dropped from his brother's smiling face to the watch; his tongue moved across dry lips.

"Go!" he called.

Schuyler split the water by a clean, shallow dive. He began at once to use a fast side stroke, his body surging forward without halts between the sweeps of his powerful arms.

Rounding the grey stone at the pool's end, Schuyler was hidden for a moment; another passed before he splashed into view. He speeded up for the last half of the swim. Behind him stretched a wake of ever-widening ripples, breaking the dark surface of the pool.

Allan dropped to his knees at the edge of the float, the flesh of his body quivering beneath his sweating skin.

Schuyler came plunging on. Only a few strokes now to the finish. Allan caught the sound of his brother's heavy breathing.

"Time!" he called as Schuyler flashed past.

Schuyler eased his stroke and turning, swam slowly back.

"How about it?" he panted. "Did I lower the record?"

Allan reached far out over the water.

"What the devil!" Surprise, quick fear, showed in Schuyler's face. "Let go my shoulders, Allan."

Allan tightened his grip.

"Yes, Schuyler," he spoke with deadly calm, "you've lowered the record of all manhood!" On his face was the same grim look that had settled there the night he had so nearly killed a man in his brother's behalf.

"Let go, damn you! Let go!" Schuyler cried, between the gasps of his heaving lungs.

Allan's lips were a sealed line against further useless words. He dragged his brother through the water, closer to the float.

The coward's brand showed plain in Schuyler's terror-widened eyes, but gathering every ounce of his spent strength, he drew his knees quickly up and gaining a foot-purchase against the floating stage, strained to push free from Allan's hold.

But the long swim had taken its toll. Allan jerked Schuyler half out of the water, and plunging him down, cut short the cry that started from his throat. Then steadying his merciless grip, Allan held his brother's head beneath the surface, glaring without pity down through the water at the appalled face. With unshifting gaze he watched the muscles of Schuyler's jaws tighten as he strained to hold in his breath; watched until the jaws dropped and the trail of bubbles spurted to the surface. Just at the end, hate flashed in his brother's eyes before the death-glaze shut out consciousness. When the last feeble quiver ran through the drowned body, Allan dragged his eyes away from the ghastly face. After a moment to steady himself, he slid silently from the float into the pool. Clutching a handful of wet hair, he towed the dead man halfway to the grey stone. When directly in the line of Schuyler's swim he let go. He waited, treading water, while the body slowly sank. As it drifted downward it turned. Again the glaring eyes stared full at

Allan. Shuddering, he swam swiftly to the float, frantic to leave the water that held the dead thing he had made.

But, on land again, Allan walked without haste through the quarter-mile of woods between the pool and the open lawn about his mother's house. Reaching the end of the wood, he broke into a run, and began calling for help.

When the body of Schuyler Van Norden had been lifted from the bottom of Black Pool, it was unmarked. The doctors agreed that death had been caused by the violent effort of the test swim. Where it was found the pool was some thirty feet deep; no wonder that Allan's diving had been useless. Even had he reached the exhausted man before he sank, it would have been to no purpose. When the heart once stops, as the doctors said, it stops forever.

After a time, life fell again into adjustment in the two houses at Black Pool. A new interest arose to dull the edge of Mrs. Van Norden's grief. An interest that caused Allan to show gladness when with Marion or his mother; to lie in wakeful thought, hour after hour during the night when darkness hid the frown of doubt that ploughed his forehead. When, in daylight, he saw in Marion's eyes the look of expected joy, he would smile bravely back at her. Seeing her face alight with life's secret, he would forget for the moment the stare from terror-widened eyes that followed

him; and be glad that those eyes no longer lived to see this woman.

Allan did not know the murderer's remorse; he felt as a man might who had crushed the head of a viper that had poisoned the woman he loves. And yet, alone, the memory would come of eyes, staring up through water; and he would see again the twisted blue-lipped grin on his victim's mouth. From Marion, he hid all trace of unrest, of doubt; his manner toward his wife grew more gentle, more tender, as the day drew nearer.

"If you are so good to me, Allan, our child will find a spoiled mother to put up with," she told him.

But in spite of all his caution, she twice caught him off guard. Late one afternoon she came into the library; Allan was staring, vacant-eyed, at the empty fireplace. He lifted the hand she laid on his shoulder and kissed it in silence.

"It's strange, Allan, we never thought of it before, but if, dear, it's a man child, I'll let you call him Schuyler."

He wondered how he managed to smother the blaze of hate in his eyes before it had burned through the wall of his secret.

His second lapse had been harder to cover. Marion was resting while he made ready for dinner. He had left the door to his dressing-room open that they might call to each other, begrudging the short time that shaving took him from her.

"Allan! Allan!" He heard Marion's voice as from a distance. "Why don't you answer? Allan, stop!

Don't look that way!" She was beside him, gripping his arm, the fright in her tone brought him to full consciousness. But he had no words to explain why he had stood silent, staring, for how long he did not know, at the reflection in the bowl of clear water before him.

This was the beginning of a dread that grew day by day; from that time, Allan could never again trust himself to look into still water.

The January of that year held dreary throughout its length. The last morning of the dismal month struggled to life beneath a slate-coloured sky. All day steady sleet beat against the soiled surface of a two-weeks-old snow. Allan stayed within the walls of his house, fretting at his helplessness, starting at each sound that came from Marion's room. It was during the saddest hour of the day that he went through those moments which were a Hell to him, a senseless torture to her he loved. When at last his mother came to him, he cried out at the change in her face.

"For God's sake, tell me quickly, Mother!"

She put her old arms about his neck and drew down his head until his cheek touched hers.

"You have a daughter, Allan!" She spoke as bravely as she could.

"But Marion?"

He felt her sudden tears wet his cheek. Catching her shoulders he dragged her to where the last grey light lay stagnant against the western window.

"Marion!" he cried. "She is not dead?"

"No; but go to her, Allan. Go to her quickly!"

He tore from the room and ran blindly down the hall. At Marion's door he stopped, clinging to the knob, while he forced himself to calmness. Then he went swiftly to the bed and fell to his knees beside her; all the longing of life in his look at Marion's closed lids.

"Precious," he whispered, "I am here with you."

Her hand moved feebly toward him. He caught it up and held it against his heart. Her eyes opened; the shadow of a smile crossed her lips.

"My Allan," she whispered back in answer. Then her eyes closed . . .

It was his mother who at last broke the grip of Allan's fingers that held Marion's cold hand; she who led the dazed man from the room.

The effect of his loss was a shock to those who loved Allan. That he had cared for Marion with a devotion only short of worship was plain to all who had seen them during the few months of their married life. But it mystified his friends to see this strong, controlled man sink into despair. From the night his mother had taken him from that room where Marion's life had been torn from his keeping, Allan had been as one numb to all sensation. Now always silent, he wandered aimlessly through his shattered home as if searching, ceaselessly searching. His hopeless steps took him from room to room, from floor to floor, but always he shunned one part of the house.

His mother's tactful efforts to break his lethargy were unavailing. Often, when she spoke to him he

would not answer; then, the question being repeated, he would turn to her bewildered. For two months after Marion's death Mrs. Van Norden watched in silence, but with growing fear, Allan's strange manner. Then, unable to bear it longer, she went to him determined to put an end to his brooding at whatever cost. He was, as she now so often found him, sunk back in his chair, looking vacantly at his empty hands.

"Allan, I have something to ask; something you must no longer refuse." She put all her mother love into her voice.

"Yes.—Yes.—What did you say, Mother?"

She shook him gently.

"I said there is something you must do for me. Grief, Allan, has its place, perhaps its use; but to give way to it utterly is a weakness, unworthy of a boy of mine."

He offered no answer, meeting her look as if he but dimly heard.

"There is something else, Allan, that is both unworthy and unjust. How can you feel bitterness against—against your baby, your own daughter?"

He turned away from her.

"I beg you, Mother,—I can't. I tell you I can't!"

"And I say, what you can't do, is to let this morbid, unnatural thing live and grow in you. It is getting worse every day. Yesterday, when you were in the upper hall, and I opened the nursery door, you fled down the stairs. Do you ever think how that hurts



me?" She paused, to end in lower voice: "How it would hurt her?"

He hid his face.

"Allan," his mother pleaded, "I ask you to break the power this aversion has gained over you. I ask it in Marion's memory, for your child's sake."

For a long time silence, before he answered in smothered voice:

"What do you want me to do, Mother?"

"Come with me to your child."

"Now?" he whispered.

"Yes, now!"

He shrank from her.

"I promise you, Allan, there will be no one else in the room."

He sat irresolute for a moment; then got slowly to his feet.

She caught his cold hand and went with him from the room.

They were in the nursery, when she spoke again.

"Go to her, Allan," she said gently, "and see what a beautiful child you have."

He stood without sound or motion, looking at the white bassinet until his mother had reached the door. Then with a cry he sprang to her.

"Don't leave me! For God's sake, don't leave me alone with it!" Sweat stood in heavy drops on his forehead.

His mother took him by both arms.

"I'm ashamed! I'm ashamed of you, Allan! How

can you let go of yourself in this way? Come," she commanded peremptorily, "and I will show you the most wonderful thing in the world—a baby—your baby!" She took him to the lace-covered cradle. "Now look!" The white-haired woman was splendid in her anger. "Look, my son, and be a man again!"

Allan stood above the tender thing that lay looking up at him with wide-opened eyes, eyes so like his own—and Schuyler's.

Something within his grief-deadened heart answered to that look; the lines about his mouth grew less tense.

"See how perfect she is." His mother lifted the baby in her arms.

Marion's child gazed at Allan with the unfocussed eyes of babyhood. He drew nearer. Then from out of that mysterious nothing that makes a baby's world there came a something to the awakening mind. As Allan leaned forward, the soft brow creased to a minute frown, instantly after, the head was thrown far back, the small mouth opened, and from it came those sounds that pass for baby laughter.

For a second the man stared, his eyes suddenly aflame, his face twitching. Then he cried out a frightful oath and, springing back from his horrified mother, turned and rushed from the room.

Plunging recklessly down the stairs, Allan fled from the house. Not heeding his direction he went wildly on, feeling no chill from the raw wind that swept past his bared head. His distraught mind held but one

thought; he must get far from the house that sheltered the child. In his frenzied haste he stumbled and fell. During the pause after he rose he found that he was on the pathway that ended at a place of terror to him. He could not go to that path's end. As he stood uncertain, thoughts of the helpless thing, that to live had taken Marion's life, crowded his brain with fiercer hate. How quickly—how easily,—he looked at his hands; the fingers were spreading and closing in eagerness. Cursing aloud, he started running, fleeing straight onward along the path. He did not pause nor slacken his pace until he reached the floating stage at the shore of Black Pool.

No sun rays from the overcast, March sky, cut through the branches of the naked trees; the surface of the pool gleamed a sheet of dull, polished steel, under the lowering clouds.

Allan, panting hard, stood, his eyes upturned. He would not—he swore it—he would not look into the black water.

Yet why not look? Why not see once more the very spot where he had rid the world——? No!—He strove to master the spell that was drawing him closer, always closer, to the water. Inch by inch he moved against his will, until he felt the edge of the float beneath his feet. He struggled a moment longer; then dropped to his knees. His teeth ground hard together. There! There! just beneath him, below the still surface of Black Pool, floated the face of his brother! Not a blue-lipped, dead face now, but a live face dis-

torted by rage. A wind ruffled the surface of the pool, sending shifting, twisted grins across the mouth.

"He's come back!" Allan screamed. "He's come back to laugh at his victory!"

The eyes below the water grew wider, wilder; the grin played mockingly about the open mouth.

Screaming an oath, Allan thrust down a gripping hand. His fingers closed in an empty grasp—but it had not gone, that face. It was there, gloating hate at him, just beyond his outstretched hand. It must not escape! Only a little farther and he could seize it!—The mocking face sank lower beneath his deeper reach.

"I'll follow! I'll follow!" Allan cried. "You shall not escape!" He plunged into the pool.

Groping blindly to catch and throttle the hated throat, Allan forced himself down through the icy water, sinking deeper and deeper at each mad stroke.

His lungs ached for air.

"Now!—Now!"

His fingers closed about some unseen thing far below the surface. He would never let go; never loose his grip,—until,—until . . .

Long after its waters were quiet again, Allan's hands were locked about the rotting snag at the bottom of the tarn—locked long after all was still, on the surface, and below the surface, of Black Pool.

The heavy, wrought-iron gates of the Van Norden estate stand now grimly closed. The driveway leading to the deserted house on the hill, stretches weed-grown

and unused between the double row of blight-killed chestnuts. Hidden from the road, shut in by a thicket of underbrush and tangled cat-briar, desolate, gloomy, bleak, lies the sinister mirror of Black Pool.

